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Sasuke Shinden: Sunrise Volume

Prologue

We were kids lonely and starving for love, but allowed only hatred. We knew the same pain, but as friends, we changed paths. Even more, I chose the path of isolation. Bonds created heated feelings and in that time, shining like a flash, my own weakness was exposed in broad daylight.

I drenched myself in darkness and turned my face from the light. Hatred dyed my heart black. My objective was revenge on Itachi, my brother who killed my family and clan. Because Itachi was used as a tool to cover the sins of Konoha, my objective became revenge on Konoha. To trigger a revolution in this world using my own power, and to create a world without fault was my purpose. I wouldn't abandon this goal!

I stood in the way of my sole friend. A shinobi who knew the same pain. An honest and straightforward ninja who did not bend the truth. On countless occasions, I tried to shake off that destiny. And yet, without giving up and without abandoning me, in the face of inevitable death, he held out his hand. I tried to sever our bond, the sole existence of which led me from my loneliness. I was defeated. We planned to settle our disputes, and chose the Valley of the End. We saw the radiant morning sun and shared the feeling of pain in our chests, and I recall hot tears running down our cheeks. I will never in my life forget this.

Naruto.

That's the name of this friend.

"The thing I want is for all ninjas to cooperate!! Including you, of course!!" is what he said.

Naruto had his own world. I desired its existence.

It was similar to the warmth formerly given to me by my family. In this world, I was allowed to actually feel its existence, the connection of family; of love. Revenge supported my heart, while simultaneously destroying it. Hatred, like poison circulating the body, kills human feeling. Like that, it lit the flames of my heart.

I've set forth a new path. The road from the past leads to the future. But the path is not a straight one. This world still holds various pains. In my right eye, Sharingan, in my left eye, Rinnegan. These eyes once fixed on darkness now reflect the future.

Chapter 1: Dark Clouds Materialize in the World Reformation

"...Give Raikage-sama my best regards."

White mist covered the wide ocean like a veil. Most would be hesitant to say that the visibility was favorable, but the women were accustomed to the mist and could see without obstruction.

The Land of Water was surrounded by ocean in all directions. In this land, named one of the five shinobi countries, lay the Hidden Village of the Mist. Nicknamed "The Village of the Bloody Mist", the birthplace of 'Akatsuki' prompts talk of the old days, even now. Genjutsu was able to send the Fourth Mizukage, who had a hand in various crimes, to his grave, and Ao's Byakugan was dispelled.

Translator's Note: Brush up on your Hidden Mist History . I certainly had to in order to translate this part.

Due to the inauguration of the Fifth Mizukage, Mei Terumi, the Hidden Mist's state of affairs were improved little by little. Then, the Fourth Great Ninja War completely changed the way of the world.

The Five Shinobi Nations fought together and became comrades. Even after the great war the world shook with distress, but cooperation had overcome defeat. The causalities of the fighting had been great, and deep sadness still burdened the nations.

"Please come and partake in Hidden Mist's and Hidden Cloud's joint training!" Chojuro called out to the ninjas making departure preparations. He carried on his back a symbol of the Seven Ninja Swordsmen of the Mist, *Hiramekarei*, a large, double-edged sword.

Waves beat against the harbor. The ocean that surrounded the Land of Water was important to the place. Here, hundreds of people were boarding ships, and ships were being anchored. Joint training with other villages may seem dangerous, but in reality it is this kind of training that strengthens the ties of friendship. In the Fourth Great Ninja War, Naruto Uzumaki's influence stressed this kind of cooperation and helped achieve an increase in cultural exchange with other countries. Naruto wished to build a world without strife, where mutual cooperation existed between ninjas.

"This sort of gathering is supposed to lead to the future of the Hidden Mist." The Mizukage said, addressing the joint practice group's leading captain.

"Yes! It will be a foundation for friendship between the villages, and mold strength and perseverance!" She replied. As the captain, she tried to please the Mizukage, but the Mizukage reacted with a twitch to her words.

Late marriage....late marriage?!

Translator's note: In the Japanese text the words 'foundation' and 'perseverance' appear next to each other and are pronounced "kiBAN KONki". The word for late marriage is pronounced "bankon"

Aware of the Mizukage's animosity towards marriage-related topics, Chojuro quickly addressed the captain.

"Raikage-sama's land is harsh for everyone... it will be best if you're strong, brave, and put 100% into everything you do. After this season, typhoons can easily occur in this island's vicinity, so please be careful."

"Yes, thank you for your concern. Chojuro-kun, have you also become worried about the people?"

Late marriage...a harsh place...painful annulment?!

Translator's note: Again, here the Mizukage is pulling bits of words that the others are saying that sound like these Japanese words related to marriage

The Mizukage's expression immediately became grim, despite the amiable conversation between the two. A sullen aura surrounded her.

"Mizukage-sama, what's wrong?" Chojuro noticed the Mizukage sink into silence and tilt her head strangely. She exhaled and became serious.

"I was recalling something sad...if he were here...."

"Ah....sempai...I also wanted him to see my present form..."

That the Mizukage also wanted him to see how Chojuro had grown was not what she was thinking. Her feelings stemmed from different thoughts, but without denying his words, she smiled and agreed.

"Then our people will go!" Chojuro proclaimed.

The members of the group boarded the ships and slowly departed from the harbor. The advancing ship gave a splash, and as it departed, Chojuro muttered something deeply moving.

"...the Five Great Nations that hated each other, but were able to take each other's hands and come together...it's an amazing thing."

"....yes, I suppose it is."

In his own way, Chojuro grasped the changes of the transforming world, and the Mizukage greatly admired this about him. She was one of the ninjas who had survived the dark times of the Hidden Mist. Wet in her own blood and the blood of the people, she fought for her village. If she was burdened with obstacles, she was able to easily cut them down. In that time, paranoia spiraled. What did one have to protect in order to keep on living, and what was best to believe in? That period had become invisible, as if blanketed by a deep fog, but it certainly still existed. During that time, the Demon of the Mist, Momochi Zabuza, was feared, and Haku of the Snow Clan fell to the sad fate of his *Kekkei Genkai*. Ninjas like Hoshigaki Kisame were responsible for much of the darkness in the Hidden Mist, acting behind the scenes for his own self interest. At the same time, it was the age of the ninjas that called themselves 'Akatsuki.' As a ninja from the same village, the Mizukage secretly harbored a grudge against those that called themselves by this name.

Now, tensions between the Five Great Nations were relaxing, and from a world of war and conflict, a foundation was being set for change. At the same time, ninjas and ordinary people were able to come together. But not everyone can always accept change. Some people reject and hate it, and do all they can to sabotage it. The previous generation's Mizukage encountered various difficulties in the responsibilities that stemmed from the history of the Hidden Mist, and the current Mizukage, Mei was very aware of this. Change was not a simple thing.

The ship sailing towards the Land of Lightning drifted away quietly. The Mizukage watched as it grew hazy in the white mist before disappearing all together.

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"....It's gotten really cloudy."

Ships from the Land of Water had only one day to move towards the Land of Lightning. A Hidden Mist shinobi, standing as the guard of the ship's deck, looked up at the sky. White mist enveloped the ship, but still it sailed on through the weather. Suddenly, dark clouds appeared around it. Wind blew against the shinobi's cheeks, and the ocean calmed, beginning to change its appearance.

"There's probably a storm coming." The guard prepared to convey the message to his middle man on foot.

".....?" He sensed something in corner of his line of vision. Instinctively, he turned, and beyond the ocean, for a brief moment, he could see a small boat.

"....A fishing boat?...."

Aboard the boat were several figures-appearing to be fishermen. Raincoats sheltered them from the rain, and they

wore large, straw hats. In this area of the ocean there were numerous islands, and almost everybody worked in the fishing industry. There was no need to worry. Or so the guard thought. Yet, the boat was rapidly approaching their ship.

"Hey! We're gonna crash!" He yelled, but there was no sign that the boat was going to stop.

"He—y!" He set out from the ship's guard post, grabbing his forehead protector engraved with the symbol of the Hidden Mist. Ninjas of the Hidden Mist showed their pride by wearing the forehead protectors, and this unintentional arrogance was likely noted by the fishermen.

".....?"

One of the men on the boat stood up. A very profound hat covered his facial features. Slowly, he lifted it from his head, and his face became exposed. His chin, his mouth, the bridge of his nose—then,

".....!" The moment the guard saw *it* he collapsed.

"H-hey, what's going on?!" He managed to call towards the approaching boat before hitting the ground.

The surrounding ninjas grew wide-eyed. Rather than rushing over to the collapsed guard, they stood back and evaluated the situation.

"Wh-who is that!?" Someone yelled.

One of the strangers landed without a sound onto the deck of their ship. He had the ambiance of a ninja.

Noticing the commotion, the captain ran over. "Restrain him!" He screamed.

All of the Hidden Mist shinobi began weaving hand signs to restrain the mysterious intruder. The water was high here, so if they used water techniques, they would have the upper hand.

Then, the stranger calmly lifted the hat from his head.

".....!"

Promising shinobi lived through the time when the village was called the Village of the Bloody Mist and the Fourth Great Shinobi War, but only those who were skilled ninjas survived. Of all those skilled ninjas on board, not one of them was able to do harm to the lone intruder. It was here that they fell.

♦♦♦

"...they're late."

In the light rain, the Hidden Cloud ninjas waited impatiently at the Land of Lightning's harbor to greet the Hidden Mist.

"Raikage-sama gets scary when he's kept waiting."

To put it bluntly, the Raikage is rather quick-tempered. When he's angry there is a very real possibility that lightning will literally rain down from the sky.

"Perhaps the weather was bad. After all, you can't bypass the rain in the middle of the ocean."

"But wasn't a messenger hawk flying around on board? If they were going to be late it would have been easy to send a brief letter reporting it."

"That's true, but...."

Rain and wind blew against their faces. Considering the possibility of an even later arrival, they had even contemplated trying to fly over their own messenger hawk.

"Hey, wait, is that it?"

Finally, the ship appeared from the other side of the sea.

"Have they finally come?"

The ship sailed with the symbol of the Hidden Mist, yet it somehow seemed strange.

"It's oddly quiet..."

There was the shadow of a person on the ship's deck, but the Hidden Cloud ninja could not see it through the rain. As the ship approached, the rain and wind grew violent, as if they carried something sinister.

"...Welcome to the Land of Lightning!" The Hidden Cloud called to the ship as it docked. There was no reply from the ship. Thinking this strange, the ninjas exchanged glances.

"Welcome!" They yelled once more, this time louder. At last they were able to see the figures on board. They were glaring at the Hidden Cloud representatives from the deck of the ship. They wore very prominent straw hats.

".....ah....." Suddenly, the bodies of the Hidden Cloud ninjas began shaking violently, until they collapsed altogether in the pouring rain.

"Wh-what's happening?!" All the ninjas were stunned.

A figure in a straw hat jumped off the deck of the ship, tossing his hat aside. He was now fully exposed.

"Th-those eyes....!?"

In the midst of the rain, deep, crimson eyes projected a strange light. Not a single ninja was able to escape their stare.

"Damn it! It's....*dojutsu*!"

As soon as they saw those red eyes, the strength escaped their bodies and they were forced to the ground.

".....It's...amazing."

Having watched the entire spectacle, the red eyes' companions also jumped from the ship.

"There are more of those guys on that ship." The company nodded in reply to their leader's words.

On the ship at the dock more Hidden Cloud ninjas wobbled to the ground. The red-eyed stranger replaced the hat atop his head as his comrades picked up the ninjas. The weather became more and more rough, the wind fueling the black clouds that undulated like dragons.

"Carry them all on!" He yelled to his companions, jumping back on to their moving ship.

A first flash of lightning sent thunder roaring through the sky.

"I'll stain it red."

—“Peace” Such things are not allowed.

II.

The line connecting the earth and the trees was a deep green, and the roots of mossy trees and vines coiled around thick trucks in circles. The tree in the sunlight growing towards the heavens was likely hundreds of years old, and yet, its tips were sprouting new buds. A person looked down upon the tree from above it. From behind long bangs peeked his left eye's supreme *Rinnegan*. The right pupil's ordinary glance carried the Uchiha's bloodline limit, sharingan.

This person was Uchiha Sasuke.

“.....”

From the top of the large tree Sasuke gazed at the vast landscape stretched in all directions before him. After the Fourth Great Shinobi War, Sasuke had returned home again to Konoha, but left shortly after for a second time. He was travelling the world.

—When it comes to me in the shinobi world now....I want to know how to serve this world. I've been travelling for a number of years. I saw things I would not have noticed in the time that I was lost in darkness. I tried to throw away the past, but there were times when I quietly reflected on it as well. There were also moments I thought of my friends. These eyes have seen the scars of war, people moved by sadness and even the empty feeling of revenge.

Sasuke's family and clan had been painfully stolen away from him. He was left alone to try to endure through the strong poison of hatred. But he was lead astray, searching through a path of darkness. He lost sight of the important things. Only after a very long time did Sasuke finally realize this.

He also sensed the world slowly changing. The Fifth Hokage sought action to extinguish the war, and public order gradually improved. Ninjas had utilized their powers to defend their own countries and invade foreign lands, and now, with the development of machinery that could convey information in a matter of seconds, improved medical institutions and technology, and good relations with other countries, chakra could be utilized for growth in various fields. The world was facing a time of new growth. For this reason, the problem could not be ignore.

—Otsutsuki Kaguya.

She defied the taboo of consuming the fruit of the *Shinju* and obtained chakra, thus beginning troubled times. Running wild with the obsession of her own mighty power, she sealed it into her own children, Hamura and Hagoromo. Kaguya was resurrected in the modern world, and Sasuke, along with Team 7 and Uchiha Obito, sealed her once again. People rejoiced as the threat that shook the world was gone, but Sasuke still had things to worry about.

According to Black Zetsu who worked behind the scenes for Kaguya, she was saved by connecting every person to the roots of the Senju tree and placing them under the Infinite Tsukiyomi. After some time, White Zetsu seemed to be able to change them into Kaguya's soldiers. She was revived and called herself the Rabbit Goddess. After her transformation began the troubled times. Or rather, after every person was connected to the roots the Senju tree.

When the fighting was supposed to be finished in the world, why was it necessary that people be placed under the Infinite Tsukiyomi to fight again?

Those who hold power brutally seek to dominate those controlled by fear is one possibility that comes to mind, but there are no clear answers. To clear away the doubt, Sasuke was following Kaguya's footsteps. But she was the mother of chakra, and even with his sharingan, her footsteps were not easy to follow.

Translator's Note: Read about Kaguya's background [here](#).

“.....hn.....?”

Sasuke sensed a presence in the South West direction. If he focused his eyes, he could see something approaching. It was a small bird flapping its wings, but the chakra surrounding this bird was not flowing through blood, but rather through ink and characters.

Sasuke quickly took out a scroll and opened it, allowing the small bird to plunge into the paper. This ninja technique, *choju-giga*, belonged to Sai of the Hidden Leaf Village. The figure of the bird disappeared and was replaced with a spread of words from the Hidden Leaf. Sasuke frowned at the message that followed.

“....This is....”

It was a message from the current Hokage, Hatake Kakashi. It seemed that a large number of Hidden Mist and Hidden Cloud ninja had unexpectedly disappeared. Without evidence of fighting, information was scarce. If he found the incidents were related, he was to contact Konoha.

“More than one hundred shinobi disappeared?....”

If someone did this by hand they were likely *genjutsu* users. This situation was best for Sasuke to deal with, as he himself had outstanding *doujutsu* abilities. If he used his sharingan, he could often see what the other shinobi could not.

Using his special eyes, he surveyed his surroundings once more. Smoke was rising into the white clouds. This smoke was not present before, but it did not necessarily mean that a fire was burning. To put it more accurately, this smoke was more like steam. This part of the forest was near the Village Hidden in Hot Water, who's hot water baths regularly gave off steam. The Village Hidden in Hot Water was in the Land of Hot Water, close to the Land of Lightning and a ship ride away from the Land of Water.

Translator's Note: Small exert on the Land of Hot Water [here](#).

“....For now, I'll head towards the Land of Lighting.”

Sasuke chose a land route to the Land of Lightning and started heading back through the forest.

♦♦♦

He pushed forward silently without rest until the sun fell from the sky. He advanced through a forest of bamboo. The bamboo was resilient, so jumping from one tree to the next was difficult. As he tread across the shoots covering the earth, he tried to think of how to quickly get out of the forest to continue his journey. He was still in the Land of Hot Water. By the time the date changed he wanted to be in the neighboring country, the Land of Frost, and the next day the Land of Mist, followed by his final destination, the Land of Lightning.

“.....?”

As he was planning, a small village came into view. These rural villages were everywhere in this country, yet Sasuke instinctively stopped. There was not a single light on in this village. Even though it was dark, it was still too early for the villagers to be sleeping. Having just received the news of the mass shinobi disappearances, something seemed off.

“.....”

Sasuke shut his eyes for a short moment, at once charging the power of his right eye. When he opened his eyelids, three commas floated in his dyed red pupils. It was his sharingan.

He looked into the village with these eyes. Near a house surrounded by lavish bamboo, there appeared to be the figures of people. Just then, they all held their breaths motionlessly, as if something had frightened them. This bothered Sasuke, so he took a step out of the bamboo into the village.

“It’s the Dark Thunder Group, they’ve come!!” A person vigorously leaped down from the bamboo shoots towards Sasuke.

A thin, old man with a bald head was clutching a bamboo spear and charging towards him. His movements were weak and foolish. It seemed as though his ninjutsu was as ordinary as any average person’s. Sasuke lightly jumped to the side to avoid his attack.

“.....!” From the place where he landed he could feel the presence of chakra behind him.

“Water technique: Storm of hail!” The high-pitched voice of a young girl echoed through the bamboo, and countless water bullets suddenly flew towards Sasuke.

—*Katon: Goukakyu no Jutsu!* (Fire technique: Great Fireball) It was the Uchiha’s preferred jutsu. Sasuke’s flames engulfed the water bullets, immediately evaporating them.

“Huh—! My water technique lost to that fire technique?!”

Without even coming in contact with his opponent’s shadow clone, he extinguished it. His opponent screamed. He could see a short, baby-faced girl stand up.

“Chino, I’m coming down!” Pushing aside the woman called Chino appeared a large, muscular man. He seemed to already be preparing his kunai to throw at Sasuke, the point of it aimed at his heart. Sasuke sensed chakra covering the thin edge of the blade, and jumped off the bamboo stalk to avoid it. The kunai pierced the bamboo, and with a shrill cracking sound, it was blown away.

“Wind nature transformation?”

Due to the wind chakra’s slicing Kunai, a small hole was pierced in the bamboo which filled with expanding air, forcing it to burst.

“Quickly, bring him down!”

“.....I said he was strong, and you didn’t listen to me!” Sasuke saw Chino frown at the old man’s words. Then, she noticed it.

“It can’t be....! Nowaki, look! Those eyes....it’s sharingan!”

As Chino said this, Sasuke directed his eyes directly at her.

“Is that the real deal....?” The large man called Nowaki asked with a surprised expression on his face.

“You good-for-nothings! If that’s how it is, I’ll do it!” The old man shouted at Nowaki. “I’ll destroy Dark Thunder for my daughter’s revenge!” Grasping the bamboo spear, he rushed towards Sasuke once again.

“Hn,” Sasuke breathed, taking his katana in his hand.

"Dieeeeeee!" The old man stuck out his bamboo spear, and with great ease, Sasuke cut it in half all the way down to the old man's hands. Immediately, he shoved the point of his katana against his throat. Aware of the cold weapon against his skin, the man's breathing became heavy. His bamboo, now no longer than the length of one segment, fell from his hand. Sweat began dripping from his old, dry skin.

"W-wa-wait! Oniisan! Boss! Good-looking guy! Handsome man! Please don't kill him!" A panicking Chino tried to appease Sasuke.

"It's a misunderstanding. I don't know of the Dark Thunder Group."

Still trembling in fear, the old man's breathing became less and less audible. They stood in silence. Sasuke moved the katana slightly away from his neck.

"I'm not Dark Thunder." Sasuke said again.

"Hu....h?"

"It's the first I've heard the name." He lowered his katana.

The old man breathed a sigh of relief and slumped to his knees. Chino and Nowaki exchanged glances when they heard Sasuke's words.

"Old man lou! It was a misunderstanding!" Chino yelled, to which the old man lou retorted with a loud, "shut up!"

"Now, not in this place! My heart–, my heart hurts!" Released from the scare of death, lou's chest was throbbing greatly. He was frantically breathing the air.

"Sorry....for this harsh mistake." Nowaki apologized on behalf of the old man.

"Although I have a feeling that if we really had fought, we would have died, I'm sorry," Chino apologized, putting both hands together. "Although old man lou hasn't apologized, he really is sorry!"

Sitting down in protest, lou turned his face away from Sasuke and spat, "This guy's doing bad passing through the Bamboo Village in such a time."

"Damn old guy!" Chino yelled.

"What?!" He retorted.

Chino's words prompted lou to attempt to get back to his feet, but instead, he fell back into place.

"I thought today for sure we would establish an end to the Dark Thunder....!" lou said in frustration, pounding the dirt.

"....Who the hell are these Dark Thunder?"

"Enemies of my daughter," lou answered Sasuke.

"Umm, it's become a long talk....jii-chan, let's get back to the house for now to properly explain the situation to him."

Like a stubborn child, lou refused to acknowledge Chino's suggestion. With disgust, Chino exchanged a look with Nowaki.

"lou-san, let's go back...." Nowaki said coercively, trying to help Chino convince him.

"Damn it!" He gave in.

Nowaki started walking towards the village with Chino following after him, her arms folded over the back of her

head. Watching Nowaki's back, Chino turned over her shoulder. "Hurry," she urged.

"This is going to turn troublesome." lou mumbled.

Sasuke followed after the three as they continued to bicker.

".....!?" Suddenly, he froze. Behind him he felt the gaze of a person.

"....." Turning around he could only see the bamboo forest spread out in front of him.

"Oniichan, what's wrong?" This concerned Sasuke, but hearing Chino's voice, he gave one last glance to the bamboo forest, then followed the three to the village.

♦♦♦

He was lead to lou's house. Much like the rest of the Village of Bamboo, lou's house seemed to be surrounded by remarkably tall bamboo shoots. Inside his house were items that ranged from the daily necessities to various children's toys crafted from the village's bamboo supply.

"Much of life in the Village of Bamboo is selling our bamboo works." Behind Chino Sasuke could see stacks of bamboo fishing rods, wicker baskets weaved out of bamboo, and spare stalks of the plant.

"Don't touch those!" lou snarled, snatching the bamboo rods, but without shrinking from lou's snarl, Chino took a toy bamboo spinner and sent it flying around the room. It seemed as though it would land on Sasuke's head, but he caught it in the brink of time.

"All of this is sold to the Hidden Village of Hot Water because they have lots of tourists. Although the unit prices are cheap, they don't seem to yield much of a profit," Chino explained.

"Shut up!" lou shouted defensively.

The Hidden Village of Hot Water was rare because it was a shinobi village that had also evolved into a tourist hotspot. From the large quantities of materials and bamboo sticks stacked in a heap on the workshop floor, one would assume that the demands of this lifestyle were difficult.

"To tell you the truth, before Nowaki and I walked to the Hidden Village of Hot Water, we were in show business," Chino began.

"Show business?"

"We were wanna-be-ninja travelling entertainers. We came to the Hidden Hot Water's hot springs to make money because we knew entertaining here would turn to gold for us." Chino breathed out with a puff, and one by one, soap bubbles came out of her mouth. To ninjas, this jutsu was nothing special, but it was probably well received by the general public.

"On our way to another place, we happened upon the Village of Bamboo. When we stopped by to stock up on food, this old man begged us to help him, and we got caught up in his revenge."

This was hardly the real issue at hand.

"It's all Dark Thunder's fault!" lou yelled over Chino's words. "Dark Thunder's a cold-blooded, villainous group! They aim to pillage small villages, and they kill for fun! Several months earlier my daughter got married, and they attacked that village...everyone was killed!"

So this was the grudge he spoke of?

Thinking of his daughter made tears form in the corner of lou's eyes. "Finally able to be blessed with the gift of children, and my beloved daughter....taken! She married last spring, and planned to have children right away!" It was easy to see that lou's feelings surpassed his words. He was clenching his teeth to fight back tears.

"When my daughter died, my wife laid down and died of shock."

Tragedy through tragedy, lou remained alone. To be driven by revenge was probably inevitable in his situation. Quietly listening to lou, Nowaki looked on him with pity.

"The people in this area fear the Dark Thunder Group, and are waiting with bated breath for them to come for the village. Just look at the window."

No light shone through the window, but instead, a blackout curtain was spread out across it. Other family's houses were the same. But if Dark Thunder ambushed, this surely wouldn't stop them.

"You! You are strong! Please, lend me your power!" lou quickly rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, realizing that in order to achieve his revenge, he would have to depend on Sasuke.

"Umm, isn't that request a little selfish?" Chino asked.

"Shut up!"

"You wouldn't even apologize before!" She roared with a surprised expression on her face, to which lou began rapidly muttering words of apology as he bowed his head to Sasuke. He left his head down without trying to raise it again, likely attempting to hold the position until Sasuke spoke.

Unable to just watch, Nowaki lowered his voice and said, "Although lou-san is not supporting his own cause, to tell you the truth, it seems as though the leader of the Dark Thunder Group looks up to 'Uchiha Sasuke.' In fact, they've declared it."

"....What did you just say?" His own name came out suddenly. Sasuke raised his eyebrows involuntarily.

"....That's you, isn't it? Uchiha Sasuke. It seems he admires you."

lou was different, but being ninjas, Chino and Nowaki understood the gravity of the situation. Even more, they were travelling performers. They had travelled the world, and were clever concerning current news. Surly as soon as they saw Sasuke's sharingan, they guessed it was him.

Sasuke had no memory of a group that called themselves the Dark Thunder. His name being revealed arbitrarily was, of course, troublesome, but the reality that someone's evil deeds were for Sasuke's respect made a dark shadow fall over his heart. This shadow was heavy.

"....it can't be helped." He muttered wearily.

Since his name was out, he could not claim to be unrelated. Besides, the Dark Thunder Group had produced a lot of damage, and it was clear that this village had been exposed to that fear. Also, with the large number of shinobi disappearances he could not afford to abandon this village. After all, Sasuke's reason for travelling the world included atonement.

"What, you're gonna help us?" It was clear Chino did not think Sasuke to be the cooperating type. She looked at him with wide eyes.

"This matter has nothing to do with me, and I'm saying to settle it yourselves. I think I should refuse outright and leave."

This was something that the old Sasuke would have said, but it was unlikely that he was going to refuse to help them. If he had been his old self to begin with, he would have passed right through this village to get to the Land of Lightning.

"You're gonna do it, aren't you?! Surly you're the only one who can!" lou raised his head, his face showing off a large smile.

How his attitude changed! This lou made Sasuke recall another person he had once met. Tazuna, the carpenter from the Land of Waves. In order to build a bridge in his country in a time where there were various obstacles and difficulties, Tazuna became stronger to fight for his cause. What this a particular characteristic that developed in such times? Even though a person precious to Tazuna was killed, he risked his life to fight for the future of his country. lou was the exact opposite, desiring the power of hatred and revenge to move forward.

"For the time being, it's okay. There's no sign of Dark Thunder coming, so we can rest," Chino yawned.

"Yes, you are free to use this room....If those guys come, please take care of us," lou said, shutting the window.

He certainly believed that the village would come under attack. In the black of his eyes, there was a darkness that desired to punish the Dark Thunder who killed his daughter. In order to resolve the incident, Sasuke would provide his assistance, but he did not plan to provide his revenge. lou did not grasp the place he spoke from. Sasuke went to room that was offered to him and chose not to reply to lou's words.

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".....Now then. Try saying it once more."

They were in a small village in the cover of a mountain. But now, there were no villagers there. Every house and family was destroyed, and tragically, every life extinguished. There were only lively animals sniffing out the scent of blood. In the destruction of these homes, a man sat at a table and threw a ball against the wall, raising the corner of his mouth at his subordinate. This person had straight, bluish-purple hair and pale lips. Only today, they were glittering and shining.

"Yes! Around the time that it gets dark, we'll search the Village of Bamboo and find the man who holds sharingan! Karyu-sama, it's probably Uchiha Sasuke....!"

The ball bounced back from the wall, landing in a pool of blood beside a man's corpse before rebounding back into Karyu's hand.

"Uchiha Sasuke....the sole survivor of the proud Uchiha clan.....he's in the Village of Bamboo?...." The man called Karyu laughed maniacally, jumping down from the table and throwing the ball against the wall once again.

Don!

There was large explosive sound, and the subordinate instinctively covered his ears and shut his eyes. When he opened them, he saw Karyu walking outside through a gaping hole in the wall. Looking up at the moon concealed behind riffs of clouds, Karyu extended his arms high up into the sky.

"With the spirit of my master and my powerful bloodline limit, I will be known throughout the world!... and that Uchiha Sasuke....I'll have the chance to kill him!" He yelled with great delight to his subordinate, who stood by awaiting orders.

"You! Get to work! The time is just right to leave for the Village of Bamboo....destroy it all! Leave nothing in one piece!"

III.

The enormous gates connecting the village to the outside world shut out the dark night. The soft moonlight shining from behind light clouds illuminated the carved, stone faces of the previous Hokage. Throughout the shinobi villages, the history of the Land of Fire and The Hidden Leaf were particularly old. Once before, 'Akatsuki's' Pein had attacked the village, causing devastating damage to the Hidden Leaf, but now it was more prosperous than it had been even before the attack. Even the population, which had suffered greatly from the Fourth Great Ninja War, was gradually recovering. Those trying times were an essential part of what now made the village so successful.

Translator's Note: Meaning of the あん Symbol on Konoha's Gates

They were in the Hokage's office. A letter had arrived from the Hidden Mist and Hidden Cloud, and the Sixth Hokage, Kakashi, had just finished sending confirmation.

".....this is quite serious." He took a deep breath.

Master ninjas had to be behind the disappearances. In the case of the Hidden Mist, more than a hundred shinobi, including their ships, were taken out in one go. According to the Hidden Cloud, it seemed there were some people who saw the Hidden Mist's ship in the waters close to the Land of Lightning. If that was the case, once the ship got to the port there was a possibility that it reached the shore, but the whereabouts of the Hidden Cloud's ship remain unknown. Without any footprints or scents to track, and above all, the vast ocean, even Kakashi's ninja dog summons who specialized in tracking, were having a difficult time. The Hidden Mist's and Hidden Cloud's efforts were no different.

In the past, these sort of matters were kept confidential, but more and more these days information seemed to extend to the five nation's hidden villages, and this news was able to be sent to the Hidden Leaf, the Hidden Stone and the Hidden Sand respectively. In the present world, the state of one land's affairs concerned the others. When this news arrived, Kakashi promptly contacted Konoha's ninjas. He suspected that genjutsu was behind the disappearances, and it seemed the Hidden Cloud and Hidden Mist had similar suspicions. Even more, if it was genjutsu, it was an unknown genjutsu.

Sasuke also had the same thought after receiving the news from Kakashi. Sasuke had said that his journey concerned information and atonement. The shinobi in the village were different. They had freedom, and an effective mask to hide behind. Before anything else, Sasuke had his sharingan and rinnegan. His eyes reflected things other ninjas were not able to understand.

He heard a knock on his office door.

"Hokage-sama," The voice was that of the previous Hokage's aid, Shizune.

"Yes, come in," Kakashi replied. Shizune now aided him as his assistant.

"Pardon me, Sixth, but I have a report from Sai...." Her face was in the crack of the open door, and her dim expression hinted to Kakashi of what was to come. Sai had been requested to send the information to Sasuke. This meant it most certainly reached him, but Shizune's expression looked worried.

"Ahh, continue," Kakashi called out.

"Well...." Shizune looked over her shoulder at the open door.

“Pardon me.” Sai walked into the room wearing the same cunning smile he always wore.

Translator’s Note: [This one](#)

“Pardon me.....” Following Sai, came Haruno Sakura with an apologetic expression on her face.

“Hm?” Kakashi looked confused.

Translator’s Note: Question marks literally floated over Kakashi’s head in this part of the translation, but there is not a good way to say this in English. So, please click [here](#).

From behind Sakura, one more person came into the office.

“Yo! Kakashi-sensei!” With a boundless, goofy smile spread across his face, in walked the hero of the last great war, Uzumaki Naruto.

Translator’s Note: [Click here for Naruto’s Smile](#)

“Come in I guess, Naruto.” In any case, Naruto and Sakura were there with Sai. Naruto raised his arms behind his head and laughed the way always did.

“When I saw Sai was on his way to Kakashi-sensei’s place, I followed him!” He admitted without any hint of embarrassment.

“Sakura, you as well?” Kakashi looked unsurprised.

“I was investigating a matter with Shizune-san....”

The truth was, when Sai and Naruto asked Shizune for a face-to-face meeting with the Hokage, she became aware that she wasn’t invited and wanted to be.

“First of all.....let’s listen to Sai’s report.”

“Yes. The other day, my message seemed to arrive safely to Sasuke.”

“Your Choju giga bird flew towards the North. After this many days, Sasuke should be around the Land of Hot Water or the Land of Frost.”

When Sakura heard mention of Sasuke, her heart dropped. Sasuke was alive somewhere even now. Just knowing this, she was able to feel some relief.

“Kakashi-sensei, has there been any progress with the ninja disappearances?” Naruto unfolded his arms from behind his head, looking at the report Kakashi held in his hands. “After all, there’s no evidence....”

“Sixth, this matter is worrisome,” Shizune said.

“To tell you the truth, even the Konoha ninjas don’t seem to know the whereabouts of the missing shinobi,” Sakura added, nodding.

“Come again?” Kakashi’s leaned back in his chair.

"In the Hidden Cloud and Hidden Mist these disappearances don't seem to be a huge deal. In the last three months there were others....It's possible there are still other disappearances not yet out on the table."

Even now there were many dangerous missions where ninjas disappeared. Compared with the past, more people were able to come and go to engage in cultural exchange with others. This was no longer particularly rare, but Kakashi was troubled by something.

"Then what has Sakura been researching?"

As a medical ninja, Sakura was busy every day, but it was a little surprising that she was using her skills to do research.

"A regular patron of Ino's family has disappeared on the road. Ino said this person was very unlikely to go missing, and I remembered as soon as I heard about the Hidden Mist and Hidden Cloud disappearances. I was looking into it." Sakura seemed to be avoiding eye contact with Kakashi.

Yamanaka Ino was Sakura's friend and rival kunoichi. In addition to being a kunoichi, Ino had continued running her family's flower shop as a businesswoman.

"I was going to report it when I knew more details." If that was the case, Sakura was trying to keep it secret from Kakashi.

"It's okay...thanks. It's better you leave me to worry about it." The people with the most power received all the information, but this matter was different. Whether the news conveyed to the Hokage was good or bad did not matter, there was much news Kakashi did not receive. This is why other's opinions were valuable to him. Kakashi thought it was good timing that Sakura had overheard Naruto and went along with him to the office.

Poof poof!

"Lord Sixth, there are intruders in the village!" Suddenly ninjas from Konoha's Barrier Team materialized in the Hokage's office.

Translator's Note: Here's some info on Konoha's Barrier Team [here](#).

"Have they made contact with the barriers?"

The Hidden Leaf had barriers stretched around the entirety of the village, including underground and in the sky. After Akatsuki's attack, the barriers had been strengthened.

"Well....they've already made it to our interior barriers at the front gates of the village...."

"What?!"

"Barrier Team ninjas are on their way to the sight right now...." The rest of the ninja's sentence trailed off.

".....?!"

Just then, the sound of an explosion was heard from somewhere in the distance. Everyone's heads turned towards the open window.

"Kakashi-sensei, there are flames...." Sakura pointed in the direction where the explosion had sounded. It had created a fire.

“Kakashi-sensei! We’ll go now and report back! (tebayo)”

Translator’s Note: I know we all want to hear Naruto say ‘datebayo’, so whenever he uses it, I’ll put it like this after the English translation: (tebayo)

Sai lowered a scroll to his waist and quickly spread his brush across it. He painted large birds with outspread wings in black ink.

“Ninja art: Choju giga!”

From the scroll, the ink birds were born, spreading their wings wide before exiting through the open window. Their massive wings flapped up in the air as the ninjas mounted the ink birds; Sai first, followed by Sakura and Naruto.

“I entrust it to you.” They nodded to Kakashi’s words before flying off in the direction of the flames.

“Sixth, I’ll send out fire fighting instructions immediately!” Shizune said, to which he agreed with a nod.

Kakashi glanced at the letter placed atop his desk from the Hidden Mist and Hidden Cloud.

“What the heck is going on?....”

♦♦♦

Naruto, Sakura and Sai rushed towards the gates of the village where the flames were rising on the backs of Sai’s choju-giga birds. In the middle of their flight, Sai abruptly lowered his altitude, nearly skimming the rooftops of buildings.

“Sai, what are you doing?!” Naruto shouted, but he soon realized what Sai was doing. Dashing across the rooftops he saw the outlines of a three-man-cell.

“Shikamaru?!” Sakura looked down to where Naruto was yelling.

“It’s Ino and Chouji too! Good thing Sai noticed them!”

It was *Inoshikachou!* They seemed to hear Naruto’s and Sakura’s voices.

“You guys heading towards the village gates too?” Shikamaru yelled.

“Hop on!” Yelled Sai, and the three ninjas jumped onto the ink birds alongside their companions. The moment Chouji jumped on, the bird was thrown off balance, nearly colliding with a nearby building. Without pausing, Sai steered the bird higher, and everyone could see each other above the buildings once more.

Shikamaru, Ino and Chouji had been childhood friends, and later formed a three-man-cell under the instruction of Sarutobi Asuma. Now each of them had their own respective positions, and were less likely to work in a set.

“We were following the trail of the Yamanaka’s flower shop patron.”

At Shikamaru’s words Naruto recalled the research Sakura had been doing for Kakashi’s report.

“Do you have a lead?”

“He was last seen staying at an inn. The landlady said he was there for a hot-spring cure, but she said he returned home to Konoha.” They gathered that this patron wished to keep his whereabouts secret.

"Did you get any information on your way back?...."

Ino nodded to Naruto's question.

"This person....Tadaichi-san, lost his wife very early. He was the type of man who would come in to our shop and buy flowers to place by her grave. He served in the Konoha Anbu for a while, but he retired this year to return to the place where he spent time with his wife long ago...."

This patron had been around since Ino was small.

"Because of what is happening now in the Hidden Mist and Cloud, we're worried the incidents are connected. There was also an investigation in the Hidden Cloud, but at the time it was difficult because rain kept washing away the trail." Chouji most likely received this information from the kunoichi of the Hidden Cloud, Karui, whom he stayed in touch with.

"Anyways, the situation went something like that," Shikamaru said, closing the story and staring ahead at the village gates. On the inside of the blocked gates, there were flames in the Hidden Leaf Village.

"Shikamaru, when we were at Kakashi-sensei's place earlier, intruders seemed to be in the village. The Barrier Team ninjas were supposed to be heading over," Naruto filled him in.

"If that's the case, do we know if the Barrier Team found the enemy?"

Naruto leaned forward and strained his eyes to see what was going on up ahead.

".....Over there!" In Naruto's line of vision, a Barrier Team ninja was fighting what seemed to be an enemy ninja.

At the same time, Shikamaru raised his eyebrows and said, "What's the meaning of this one-way fight?"

As Shikamaru said, the Barrier Team ninja were completely avoiding physical attacks, as if intending to retreat. Already it seemed there were causalities, and the figure of a ninja could be seen lying in the road.

"Eh?" Ino said abruptly, raising her voice.

"What is it, Ino?" Sakura asked, but Ino remained quiet. At the same time, a person leaped up at her.

"Ino, watch out!" Sai grabbed her arm and pulled her backwards.

"No way...." Ino said, continuing to watch the enemies fight the Barrier Team. Hot blood ran down her cheek, drawing Chouji's eye.

"Ino, what happened?" He called.

Her lips quivered trying to get out the words. ".....Tadaichi-san."

"Huh?"

"Tadaichi-san!" Everyone was shocked when they heard her. The man wearing travel clothing whom Ino was yelling at was Tadaichi-san.

"Are you sure, Ino?" Shikamaru asked to clarify, a serious expression on his face.

"I'm positive! But he's not the kind of person who would fight against Konoha! Why.....?"

"If that's the case.....Is it possible he's come under genjutsu?..."

At Shikamaru's words, Sakura finally understood. Then, she saw the face of another enemy.

"As Shikamaru said, it's possible..."

"What is it, Sakura?" Until just now, Sakura's mind was recalling the information she had researched on the missing person.

"What is it?!"

"It's the Konoha shinobi! Maybe all of them...." She said, piecing everything together.

Shikamaru clicked his tongue with a loud, "Chi". He kept watching the Barrier Team's non-combative maneuvers. In the middle of the Barrier Team they noticed there were Konoha ninja.

"So they have to be offensive....!"

If it was genjutsu, there was a possibility the affected shinobi could return to consciousness, and the Barrier Team were certainly fighting with this belief. Their attacks were half-hearted, and their offensive maneuvers merely contained Tadaichi.

"What's that?.....What's going on? (tebayo)" Something was swelling up inside Tadaichi's body, and Naruto suddenly had the pressing feeling that danger was imminent. In the Barrier Team's fight, Tadaichi fell injured to the ground, his body shaking.

".....! Watch out!" Naruto jumped out in front of him.

"Kage bunshin no jutsu!! (Shadow Clone Technique)" Weaving the hand signs mid-air, shadow clones materialized, one landing beside each Barrier Team ninja respectively.

"Naruto?!"

"Jump!" Naruto's shadow clones hoisted the Barrier Team shinobi up to Sai's choju-giga, immediately separating them from the ground.

Looking back, Tadaichi could be seen slowly getting up. Despite his wounds, his face remained expressionless. Blood was spilling out of his open wound, bubbling and foaming, but this was not all. Tadaichi's body was transforming. It was as if as if something living was crawling around his insides.

"It's detaching from his body...!"

Naruto took the Barrier Team shinobi a distance away and dropped them in a safe place before running over to try to rescue Tadaichi.

Tadaichi's body, like a swelling ball, could no longer take the pressure, and his skin began to tear. Then—

".....!!"

A piercing *don!* sounded, and he burst open with an explosion. The houses in the vicinity of the destructive blast could not withstand the impact and were destroyed. Fortunately, Naruto's shadow clones that were close to the houses ensured that people were lead out of harm's way, but fresh flames had appeared.

"Are you okay, Naruto?!" Sai's and Sakura's chou-giga landed, and everyone rushed to Naruto's side.

"Tadaichi-san...." Ino stared dumbfounded at the pieces of flesh scattered around the scene. Concerned about Ino, Sakura placed her hand on her back.

"I'm okay," Ino said nodding, trying to control her emotions. Simultaneously, the two kunoichi rushed over to the injured Barrier Team. But the threat was not gone.

"Hey, don't you think there's something strange about this situation?"

The Konoha shinobi had likely been manipulated by genjutsu. Shikamaru's expression stiffened. Until just now they were up in arms, but all of a sudden they retreated back. They were cornered to the wall of the Hidden Leaf with both hands raised.

"Them too!" Naruto was staring at their bodies. Every person had injuries in some place, most likely from Tadaichi's explosion. Blood oozed from their wounds, and they were foaming the same way Tadaichi's were before.

"....Shikamaru! They're all going to explode (tebayo)!"

"What do we do! If multiple bodies explode now, they'll probably blow the whole place away!"

There were nine people remaining. Their bodies began to undergo a transformation, as if they were being stabbed from the inside out.

"Tch," Shikamaru clicked his tongue to the roof of his mouth in frustration.

"Can you grow wings with your Multi-size technique?!" Shikamaru yelled to Chouji.

"I, I got it!" Chouji took a bag of potato chips out of his pocket and opened them. Without pausing, he stuffed them into his mouth. While munching wildly on his chips, his body gained power.

"Uooooooooooooo!" It was an Akimichi Clan secret jutsu. Chouji's body transformed, sprouting butterfly wings up his spine. This jutsu used enormous amounts of chakra.

"Naruto, about how much time until the explosion?"

"Ten seconds!"

nine, eight, seven—

"Got it! Everyone, get behind Chouji!"

Six, five, four—

"Chouji, now, flap your wings with all your strength!"

Chouji quickly understood the aim of the strategy and stood firm. He was able to flap his giant butterfly wings creating a wind of chakra.

three, two, one—

Don! The explosion echoed. The bodies backed against the wall exploded all at once.

"Come on!" Shikamaru urged.

Chouji's massive body blocked the tornado-like wind that was heading towards the village, but the blast wave fought against his technique.

"We'll back him up! Let's go, Kurama!"

Kurama was formerly the source of Naruto's troubles, but now they were partners. The Nine Tales Kyuubi, called

Kurama, would assist Chouji's wind. Power circulated through Naruto's body, and he produced *Rasengan*. Naruto aimed his rasengan towards the shock wave and fired, his new wind forcing it back to protect the village.

"....Yes! This is good!"

Chouji's wind alongside Naruto's rasengan competed with the blast's shock wave until it was pushed to the outskirts of the village. Trees of the forest that were in the immediate vicinity of the gate were mowed down by flames of fire.

".....huh, huh.....one way or another, it succeeded right?" Chouji said breathing heavily and dispelling his jutsu.

One part of Konoha's surrounding wall was destroyed, but the inside of the village was left untouched. The flames that had risen inside the village had also been blown out in a the sudden gust.

"As one would expect," Chouji said brushing off his shoulders.

As Sakura saw more of the broken wall, she relaxed her shoulders. She would have tried to mend their bodies, but there were no pieces left to heal. Ino bit her lip. Shikamaru quickly began issuing instructions.

".....For now we'll report it to the Sixth. Sai, would you able to take us back with your *choju-giga*?" Sai put his paintbrush in place, and then—

"Naruto!"

They suddenly heard the voice of someone yelling for Naruto. Looking beyond his scroll, Sai was able to see a man with short, black hair and sunglasses running towards them.

".....Um, do we know him?" Naruto had some recollection of the man, but his name escaped him.

"Yamashiro Aoba!"

"Yamashiro Aoba.....?"

"We went to Turtle Island in the Hidden Mist together!"

"Ohhh, yeah! What, are you going there again?"

"Of course not! I've got a message from the Hokage!" With a sense of impending crisis, Aoba remembered the real problem at hand.

"From Kakashi-sensei? What is it (tebayo)?"

"A little while ago, they made it seem as though there was only one intruder, but the number is thirty."

"What?!" Their surprised voices overlapped. Thirty. Now the raid was three time that of what they had thought.

"Are there new intruders? Are you able to sense them now?" Sakura asked. Aoba nodded.

"Yeah, they're heading this way right now....."

In the middle of Aoba's explanation, Naruto felt someone's eyes watching from the other side of the destroyed wall.

"Over there.....!"

From the middle of the dark forest came the first man. Following him, more began to appear.

"Could it be.....?" Sakura asked in a surprised state upon seeing how the men were dressed. They were dressed

in shinobi clothing. It was a mix of clothing from the Hidden Mist and Hidden Cloud. Even their forehead protectors were etched with the symbols of the villages.

"This has become troublesome....." Shikamaru complained, turning towards the forest.

"Naruto, you guys, the Sixth.....Kakashi-sensei will probably be wondering what went on here. He'll want to know how many people invaded the village and ran to the scene. Guessing by the way things are now, the first intruders entered the village unnoticed by the Barrier Team."

"Nonetheless, Tadaichi-san and the others were able to manipulate the Konoha ninjas. That's why they didn't notice them slip through the barrier. But they served their purpose until the very end," Shikamaru said.

The manipulated army was slowly approaching. There was no feeling of purpose in their dead eyes.

"That's why it's likely that these guys in front of us now are the missing Mist and Cloud shinobi. Good grief, one after another...." Shikamaru shook his head.

"Shikamaru. When those guys exploded, the motive was probably to wound them. That's why when the strange chakra from their wounds was released, their bodies began to deform." Naruto and Sakura had noticed their wounds and had already been able to read between the lines to recognize the motive of the explosion.

"If that's the case, we can't carelessly get involved...." Shikamaru said, a grim expression appearing on his face as he watched the ninjas approaching. Little did they know this situation was not only effecting Konoha.

♦♦♦

"Why these joint training team ninjas.....?"

Unlike the few Konoha shinobi, dozens of Hidden Mist ninjas had been put into the action, and until they reached the inside of the village they were being forced to invade. Chojuro was fighting to protect the central institution of the village, grinding his teeth at the sight of smoke rising from various places.

"Chojuro, the elderly and children have been evacuated. I'll go with you." Having received the news of the successful evacuation, the Mizukage appeared and ran directly to the heart of the battle.

"Please steer them towards me. I have an obligation to protect the people of my village. Even when they're against me....." After all, those manipulated were Hidden Mist ninjas.

Mist always hung over the village, but this mist was different. It was rising like a dense smoke.

".....Mizukage-sama...the Hidden Mist Village.....I will protect it.....without fail!"

"I'm relying on you, Chojuro."

♦♦♦

"Boss! Please leave this to us!"

Similarly, the Hidden Cloud were standing and watching how their friends had completely changed. The Raikage was itching to engage in battle, but concerned with increasing the damage, Darui restrained him by his right arm.

"Wouldn't it be better to call Killer Bee-sama!?" Bringing up the master Killer Bee's name made people assume the worst. All the surrounding ninjas began shouting and added to the chaos.

"Shii, the identity of the enemy still can't be sensed!?" Darui asked moving towards the sensory-type ninja.

Shii frowned and shook his head.

♦♦♦

The opponents were ninjas under the spell of genjutsu. Even more, if they became injured, they would explode. What were they to do?

“Naruto-kun!” Just then, a new voice emerged. The figure of a woman with long, fluttering black hair came running towards them.

“Hinata?!” Shikamaru asked Naruto in surprise.

“After I became aware of Tadaichi’s explosion and jumped down, I called her through Ino,” Naruto said.

Born of the head of the Huuga Clan, Hinata possessed *Byakugan*. Those with byakugan had a wide range of view, and could even see through objects. These days, Hinata was also Naruto’s wife.

“Hinata, can you try to see if everyone is under genjutsu? Are they being manipulated?”

“Got it, I’ll try searching,” Hinata charged the power of her byakugan. The blood vessels around her eyes rose to the surface of her face and she opened her eyes.

—White eyes!

With the power of her eyes she could see through everything, and she quickly began investigating the surroundings. In the woods around the buildings, she didn’t miss capturing anything.

“What’s that?....”

“....it doesn’t look like there’s anything.”

“Nothing?!” Sakura yelled in surprise and frustration.

Then, how were they being manipulated?

“It’s a different chakra surrounding their bodies....”

“What do you mean, Hinata (tebayo)?”

Hinata’s white eyes reflected the answer. This strange chakra ran all throughout their bodies. Without her byakugan, such a small detail would have been unnoticed. They were the missing ninjas under genjutsu.

“Then, that chakra has completely taken over them!” If they removed the cause, there was a solution, yet Hinata’s face was not bright.

“This chakra....it seems to be flowing through every part of their bodies....it’s probably fused with them....”

They had to eliminate the chakra without causing external wounds.

“We won’t be able to easily separate this chakra from them, will we?” Shikamaru asked, ending with a sigh. “For now, let’s avoid hurting them and start to capture them instead....”

Ino frowned. “But Shikamaru, we can’t just gather them together like dango. It’s going to be nearly impossible to capture them without injuring them at all.” As Ino spoke, the ninjas in the distance mobilized towards Konoha. If one of them exploded, they all exploded.

Translator's Note: Ino says, "gather them together like dango". Dango is a food that looks like [this](#). They are gathered together on skewer sticks. You may know it as Itachi Uchiha's favorite food.

".....ah!" Naruto raised his head and gathered everyone into his line of sight.

"I came up with a good idea! (tebayo)"

♦♦♦

".....I see. But if it's Shikamaru, it will probably go smoothly." Listening to Naruto's explanation, Shikamaru smiled and let out a laugh. Naruto returned the laugh before turning to Hinata.

"Hinata can go, too." He said and Hinata agreed with a nod.

".....Well then, let's go (tebayo)!"

Naruto was to cut through the front of the group. He kicked the dirt and broke into a run. While running, he sent his shadow clones into operation. They lined up beside him and ran next to his real form. The manipulated shinobi could now see Naruto in front of them. They looked to each other as enemies. In that moment, Naruto's shadow clones scattered in all four directions like spiders hatching from their eggs.

"H-eeeey! This way! (tebayo)" One clone called.

"No, no, it's this way!"

"This way! This is right, follow me!"

The enemy was unaffected by the shadow clone's instigation. The ninjas scattered and began to pursue Naruto's clones. Naruto was widening the distance from the enemy.

"....Alright, let's go!"

Shikamaru was among the enemy ninjas. If something happened, he would probably not escape damage. He kept an eye on the man he selected, and with both hands, made seals.

—Shadow imitation jutsu!

He extended the shadow that was illuminated by the soft moonlight towards his opponent.

".....Yes!"

The man stopped in his tracks. Shikamaru moved his leg slightly to the left and the man performed the same motion.

"Hinata!"

"Got it!"

Using her byakugan, she looked for the man's pressure points. Aiming at one of them, she used her Gentle Fist technique. She gently extended her index fingers. There was no way her aim would miss with this technique. She recalled the movements of Neji, who had been called the genius of the Hyuga Clan.

"Hya!" Hinata struck his body with the secret technique over and over. The force of the technique caused the strength to escape the man's body. Shikamaru released his shadow imitation jutsu, and the man slumped to the ground.

"Did we do it!?" Hinata watched as one of Naruto's shadow clones caught the falling man in his arms.

"Because I hit his chakra points he shouldn't be able to move for a day," Hinata said as he went limp in Naruto's arms.

Using this method, it was possible to stop their movement safely. However, it required high concentration, and would be a large burden on Hinata.

"Are you okay, Hinata?" Naruto worried about her.

"I'm okay. We'll fight together," She replied, and Naruto nodded.

"Well, should we do it in one go then?" With that, Shikamaru's shadow stretched to manipulate all of the enemy ninjas at once. Doing it over was simple work and, thanks to that, everyone now lay quietly on top of the soil. Even though they were able to think of a solution, their expressions were grim.

".....This is bad....." Sakura tried to undo the genjutsu, but there was no change in the foreign chakra flowing through their bodies.

"As time passes, the effectiveness of the technique will wear off.... before their consciousness returns we need to stop the chakra flow...." Shikamaru said.

"Well, we have to try....." Aoba said, extending out his hands.

"Is it okay?" Naruto asked.

Aoba glanced at Ino.

"I'm no Inoichi, but I'll give it a shot," He replied.

Inoichi was Ino's father. Before he fell victim to the Fourth Great Ninja War, he had been the best sensory ninja in the Yamanaka Clan and worked as the joint communications leader for all shinobi in the war.

Aoba placed his left hand on the forehead of the Hidden Mist shinobi, and raised his right hand to his own forehead.

"Alright, I'm going in."

Translator's Note: For those of you who don't remember, Aoba Yamashiro is skilled in mind-reading and intel-gathering techniques. Read more on him [here](#).

Their consciousness became connected, and Aoba took off into a world of memories.

".....! This is....."

If things were normal, Aoba should have been able to see the shinobi's mind. However, as soon as he entered his consciousness, his field of vision was completely dyed red. The ocean of red spread underfoot, and started to undulate like giant waves in response to the intruder.

".....Damn it! Is this a genjutsu trap?! I've never experienced an offensive genjutsu trap...." He tried to run away, but the giant waves swept him away into a vortex of thought, forcefully swallowing him.

".....Uh, Sakura-chan, what's wrong with him?" Naruto asked, noticing the strange signs that something was

wrong. Aoba was rocking back forth as if stuck in an ocean wave.

"There must be a genjutsu trap in his mind....!" Sakura said, realizing what was going on.

"What's going on!?"

Ino's expression became stiff. Immediately, she joined her pointer fingers and thumbs from each hand together, and aimed them towards Aoba.

—Mind body switch technique!

It was the secret ninja technique of the Yamanaka Clan. Ino entered Aoba's consciousness and her own body slanted towards the ground. Instantly, Shikamaru reacted with his shadow imitation jutsu, catching Ino before she hit the ground.

"Ino, are you okay....?!" Sakura asked looking from Ino to Aoba.

The struggle between their consciousness took but an instant, but for Ino and Aoba it felt like an eternity.

".....huh!" Aoba took a deep breath and fell to his knees.

"You saved me, thank you....." His mind was fairly exhausted, and he sat on the ground with both hands together breathing heavily.

"I don't know what would have happened."

Ino released the jutsu and her face was as white as a ghost's.

"Ino!"

She let out a weak laugh in response to Sakura's concern. The blood was gone from her face, and it was clear she was trying to put on a show of strength.

"Ino!" Having spent massive reserves of chakra, Ino lost consciousness. The same thing happened to Aoba, and he fell to his side.

"Sai! Carry Ino and Aoba to the hospital ! I'll examine them!" Sakura yelled, while sending chakra into Ino and Aoba's bodies with her medical ninjutsu. She had the medical ninjutsu of the previous Hokage, Tsunade. Sai quickly went to work with his paintbrush.

The sun started to climb into the Eastern sky without a care of what went on below. Sweat ran down Naruto's cheek. He sensed that a deep hatred had infected them.

Sasuke Shinden

Chapter 2: The shadows of the past resurrected by Lightning

I

“Aah, if we think about it well, you don’t need us, right? Leave it to Sasuke-chan and everything will go well.” Chino muttered making a fed-up expression, when they went out of the bamboo thicket into a wide forest.

Iou had appeared at the crack of dawn and shouted “All of you, quickly, go search and beat up the Dark Thunder Group”.

He had thought of leaving and researching alone, but too many hindrances had come in his way.

In the end, he went towards the village in which Iou’s daughter lived with Chino and Nowaki.

“...I’ll do it by myself.” Sasuke had said, and Chino complained grumbling and thinned her lips.

“But in this way it’s saying ‘You’re not necessary or something’, and I want to oppose!” He didn’t remember of saying such things, but it was also as she said.

“I insist! I don’t give in to you, Sasuke-chan!” Chino screamed with an angry look.

“It doesn’t matter, but stop calling me that way!”

“The things you said in that way does matter! Also I’m older than you, Sasuke-chan, so it’s ok to attach ‘chan’, isn’t it?”

By sight, Chino’s appearance looked like a ten-year-old little girl’s or so, but apparently she was older than Sasuke. Given that information, and that he could sense the extent of her experience, it probably wasn’t a lie, but in some respects he wasn’t fully satisfied with that.

—However, you shouldn’t judge people... by appearances and preconceptions only.

Unintentionally, these words came back to Sasuke’s mind. The words of Itachi, his older brother.

Sasuke heard them when he was very young.

In those days, Uchiha Shisui, who was a close friend of Itachi, disappointed on the Uchiha’s future had thrown himself in the Naka River.

The men of the Uchiha clan suspected that Itachi had killed Shisui.

Itachi had surrendered to those men. Then, to them, who were convinced that whatever they said Itachi would have started a fight, he said it was better not to judge people by appearances are prejudices only. If he thought back now, Itachi back then was probably angry and sad.

Without even understand Shisui’s feelings, who had sacrifice his life for the sake of the Uchiha clan, they interpreted it as it was convenient for themselves, with the Uchiha’s karma that changed completely into a means to attack the others.

Hiruzen, the third Hokage, told him a thing about Itachi, that from childhood he was aware of the sign and the teachings from the ancestors that no one remembered, and that he was a sensitive child who perceived the past shinobi and the origin of the village without being taught by anyone.

He said that without sticking to the clan, he was able to think about the future of the shinobi, of the village, and reflect about this future, and fear for it.

—Even big brother will enter here?

He had asked Itachi about the way he would go ahead to. In that place, they were in front of the Konoha Military Police Force headquarters.

The Military Police Force supervised the crimes of the shinobi, and was the force that contributed to maintain the public order. It had been founded by the Uchiha's ancestors, and Sasuke's father, Fugaku, served as the commanding officer.

Therefore, Sasuke asked if Itachi would come to work here, too.

—Well... who knows...

Itachi had answered vaguely. Sasuke, who didn't know in those days that this Military Police Force was also a method to enclose the Uchiha clan, and that there was the discussion of Itachi entering the Anbu, had asked it innocently.

—Do it! Because when I grow up... I'll enter in the Military Police Force too!!

In fact, it was just the dream of a foolish younger brother who knew nothing. However, Itachi answered him "...Maybe."

His field of vision was far away and wide, his existence exceeded the frame that was Konoha. But still, maybe that time he didn't gave him that answer because he dreamed of the day he would belong to the Military Police Force with his brother and they would strive together for a mission.

The fact that he had become the sacrifice of the Uchiha, that was Itachi's own clan, and then of Konoha, gave him a complex feeling even now.

The restoration of Itachi's honour, there was a period when he only thought about this. However, probably Itachi didn't wish for it.

Itachi, who had been revived with the Edo Tensei, on parting, had drawn Sasuke's back of the head near him, had joined together their foreheads, had looked straight into Sasuke's eyes and said these words.

—I will always love you.

Itachi had wanted to save this world for the last time, without feeling resentment and regret towards the world, because he loved his younger brother. Probably the restoration of his own name didn't matter to him.

However, it seemed that Naruto was telling everyone around him how Itachi, who had been resurrected with the Edo Tensei, had lent him his power for the world's sake.

Naruto must have come to know also about the Uchiha's coup d'état, but without alluding to it back then, he had praised his name as the only one among the shinobi who had helped him during the Great War.

He couldn't think that the people surrounding him would agree obediently to that, but the men that doubted Naruto's words weren't around him. And even if he had been doubted, Naruto would probably keep on talking without giving up.

Beside the fact if Itachi wished for it or not, maybe even Itachi had some reasons, maybe it would come the day in which even in Konoha such feeling would bud.

“Come to think of it~, Sasuke-chan, will you go back to the Village of the Hidden Leaf?” If travelling was boring, Chino asked such things. Since he was thinking about Konoha's matters, he felt a little shocked.

“...”

“Aha, you're ignoring me! Didn't you want to restore the Uchiha or something? You're the only survivor.”

“...”

“He~llo! Excuse me! Can you hear me~!!”

“Chino, quit it.”

Nowaki, who was silently looking at the situation, rebuked Chino. “Which side are you innn!” while her shout shook his eardrums, Sasuke quietly lowered his eyes.

For Sasuke, the Village of the Hidden Leaf swirled in love and hate. How did this affect him, if he hadn’t worked out a solution he might have not been able to come back soon.

Here they were approximately three hours away from the Bamboo Village. It was the village where Iou’s daughter lived.

“...It’s terrible...” Chino muttered looking at the state of the village.

The houses had been destructed, and in the remaining walls there were bloodstains that changed their colour. They entered through a wall with a big hole in it, and also the inside of the room had been violently devastated. All the valuables had probably been stolen.

“...”

A stuffed toy, which had stiffened for the blood attached to it, was lying at Sasuke’s feet. A broken picture frame had fell on the floor; in the photo there was the figure of a family with a small girl, who was holding this stuffed toy and smiling.

“...doesn’t the neighbouring shinobi village support them?”

“The fact is that Yugakure is mobilising, but it’s difficult to say if the level of shinobi is high there...”

At Sasuke’s question, Nowaki took a breath.

“Besides, Shimogakure is near, but they’re not involved in this matter. Apart from going requesting missions to the Great Countries, along the way it’s probably dangerous for the villagers that can’t use ninjutsu enough... In the first place, now the surrounding villagers even hesitate to go out of the village, because they’re afraid of the Dark Thunder Group.”

“So, they had no choice but to depend on travellers like us, who happen to pass by accidentally.”

While so many suffered there wasn’t any help. He felt that the absurdity of the world was clearly shown.

“Konoha is huge, so the necessity of life are probably granted, but here many unreasonable things are ok.” said Chino while raising her eyes towards the traces of blood that were left even on the ceiling.

“Wasn’t Amegakure a famous example? There, since it was encircled by the Country of Fire, the Country of Wind and the Country of Earth, whenever the Great Countries started a war they were dragged into it. ...over the ages, in any country, the children are the ones that suffer the most.”

Chino picked up the stuffed toy and the photo, and put them in line on the shelf.

If they didn’t catch the Dark Thunder Group as soon as possible, they might produce again identical tragedies. Unless they gathered the information regarding them.

“... ‘Go down, Dark Thunder Group’.”

“Nh?”

“Yesterday, Iou said that. Go down, what does it mean?”

Sasuke recalled Iou’s words. Strangely enough, somehow this part had stayed in his mind.

“Ah, the Dark Thunder Group, it seems that at the beginning they acted as chivalrous thieves.”

“Chivalrous thieves?”

“Yep. They say that they attacked bad guys, seized their money, and distributed it to poor people. But it seems that in those days they went by the name of Lightning Group.”

“From when they changed their name into Dark Thunder Group, they reached the point of crossing the limits of brutality.”

Well, at the beginning probably they were supporters of the weak people.

The fact that they became the exact opposite was difficult to understand, but Sasuke understood it. Giving in to the darkness takes only a moment.

No matter how much things happened, the world turns upside down within a single incident.

Love into hatred, affection and into malediction, bonds into solitude.

The Uchiha were a deeply loving clan. For this reason, when they lost love, they were completely repainted in hatred. It was the Second Hokage, Senju Tobirama, who told him this.

Sasuke’s way of life, who left himself alone and had let himself grow with the power of hatred, might be a proof of Tobirama’s words.

Nowadays Sasuke had sneaked away from the dark, but, from now on, there was also the possibility that the same thing would happen again. A violent impulse that devours the reason lay dormant in this body.

Also in order not to commit the same mistake, Sasuke needed some time alone to look inside and fix himself.

Probably he would never explain it with words, but it’d be impossible for him to betray the faith of his friends. No, he *didn’t want* to betray it.

For this reason, he had to reach the point of being able to control this Uchiha blood. If he was able to create bonds, one day he could certainly be separated from them and experience the loss of love.

Even when taking different roads, Naruto said he would stop him again, but next time he would stand on his own feet.

—Come to think of it~, Sasuke-chan will go back to the Village Hidden in the Leaves?

The reasons for not going back to the village were several, but maybe there was also a part of him that was afraid of things to keep secret from the others.

“Ne, what do we do from here? We try to explore near here?”

Sasuke had already taken an extensive view of the destroyed village.

From Iou’s tale, he was able to guess that they probably were merciless even towards women and children, but it seemed that they cruelly tormented the weak opponents that couldn’t properly fight them. It made him want to say that they bore a grudge against this village.

Maybe Iou saw the corpse of his daughter cruelly torn apart. Maybe it couldn’t be helped that he had reached to point of wanting revenge.

“...?”

If he thought about it, Chino hadn’t protested in this place at all. She had placed her ear on the ground and closed her eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

“Now, I felt it was waving.”

“Waving?”

“The water underground.”

With her ear against the ground, Chino made a hand seal. Nowaki put his index finger on his mouth to tell Sasuke to be quiet.

Chakra wrapped her body, and it penetrated through the earth.

“I made a connection. As I thought, it’s shaking… Something is drawing near the Bamboo Village…”

Probably she was a sensory type shinobi.

Also Karin, who was a member of Taka, excelled in sensing, she saw even through the chakra nature and transformation that even Sasuke didn’t know. It wasn’t strange that there were sensory types like Chino who understood long distance situations.

“The Dark Thunder Group?”

“It could be possible…”

Chino got up and looked up to Sasuke.

“…let’s go back.”

Sasuke kicked the ground, dashed across the village, and entered in the forest. He skipped the roots of the trees, jumping from the branches, and sped up steadily. Also Chino and the other frantically ran after him from behind.

It took three hours for them to go from the Bamboo Village to Iou’s daughter’s village, but in Sasuke’s case he had explored the hints of the surroundings and similar things at the same time, and they were movements that took time.

Now they were running through just like a strong wind, and they steadily shortened the distance to the Bamboo Village.

Finally, when the environment changed from the forest into the bamboo thicket, a great plosive sound resounded with a *doon*.

“…Sasuke-chan, I smell smoke!”

The Bamboo Village was on the windward. Clearly something was happening.

Sasuke sped up even more as he ran and trod on the bamboo leaves.

“Noo, heeelp!”

Thereupon, they heard the shriek of a woman. An apparently young woman was running away from the direction of the village, going towards their direction. Behind her there were some men who chased the woman while making a vulgar smile. Nowaki yelled:

“Sasuke, the Dark Thunder Group!”

Swords were clutched in the men’s hands, and they were firmly raised over their heads aiming at the woman.

“Haha—! We’ll kill you aaall!”

“Kya——!”

Sasuke fetched a kunai from his handbag and threw it with a flowing motion.

“Woha!?”

The kunai sent the swords flying just before they aimed at the woman’s neck.

“W-what are you doing, you bastard…”

The enemies were three. Without answering their question, he threw three other kunai.

Sasuke fired them towards the woman.

“No!”

“Damn, you’re gonna hit her…” Chino shouted with a hurried voice, but all the kunai passed through within inches from the woman’s body, and pierced the bodies of the men behind her.

“Kyaa!”

Sasuke jumped over the head of the woman, and landed amongst the men that had collapsed for the kunai, right near a man that had collapsed face up. Sasuke closed his eyes, he firmly put his strength on his pupil, and opened his eyelids. Red with three tomoe, the Sharingan. He seized the man's eyes with this eye.

“Hi...ka, ha...”

He was controlling him with a genjutsu. The men emitted foam from his mouth. Within seconds, he wasn't able to move.

“Sasuke… Sasuke of the Sharingan! I have to inform Karyuu-sama…” yelled a man who pulled out the kunai that had pierced his body, and got up. Sasuke rolled over the bamboo leaves, leaned over at the man’s feet putting his right hand on the ground, and lifted his lower half of the body with a *gun*. The sole of his left foot caught the man’s chin, and without stopping kicked up. The man had a cerebral contusion for the impact, and he collapsed showing the white of his eyes. With this, two down.

“No, noo...” the last man shouted with a miserable voice, and he probably tried to flee. Sasuke drew his sword and poured chakra into it. He stabbed the back of the defenceless man with the sword clad in electric current that burst with a *chirichiri*.

The electric current flowed into the man's body, and the man collapsed for this shock. Then, all three the men who were chasing the woman had collapsed.

“...terrifying!”

“If this isn’t instant killing...”

“I’m not killing...”

Sasuke, sweeping the electric current away from the sword, put it away in his scabbard, and peeked at the situation around him. It seemed that the villagers that had escaped from the others were also there. The Dark Thunder Group was pursuing these villagers.

He tried to help the villagers, but another plosive sound could be heard from the village.

“Sasuke-chan! We’ll do something for the villagers that escaped outside, so Sasuke-chan, do something for the village!”

Chino ran towards the direction in which she had sensed the enemy. Also Nowaki fetched a chakra sword and followed after her. Deciding to entrust the things there to Chino and the other, Sasuke dashed towards the village.

He went out of the bamboo thicket, arrived in the Bamboo Village, and there there were the figures of the villagers not moving as they were sitting in protest. It seemed that they were injured and couldn't move. They probably planned on tormenting them since they had made sure that they weren't able to escape.

“...that guy?”

In the middle of the village, there was a man who held a ball-sphere on both hands. It looked like that one was the boss.

“Damn you, Karyuu! You finally came out in this village, too...!”

In front of this Karyuu, there was Iou's figure. He had already been injured here and there, and blood was pouring from his forehead.

He was holding a bamboo spear. Iou grasped it tightly, and charged towards Karyuu.

“This will fix youuu!”

Karyuu threw the ball-sphere he was holding towards Iou. Then the ball-sphere hit Iou's chest, and burst open with a *pan*. Iou's body was blown off, and crashed into the wall of his house behind him.

“Cough!”

From Iou’s mouth, a massive quantity of blood spurted out.

“Well then, he’s out of his mind!”

Karyuu aimed at Iou’s head, who was sitting behind a wall, and threw the ball-sphere again in order to deliver the finishing blow. Iou couldn’t even move.

The piercing sound that destroyed the house echoed, and after the cloud of dust settled down, a hole had opened in the wall gaping wide.

However there wasn’t Iou’s figure.

“Y-youngster...”

“...”

Sasuke had caught Iou’s clothes just the moment before, and had escaped.

“Nh, oh, ooooooh?”

Upon seeing Sasuke after blinking several times, Karyuu made a delighted expression.

“Don’t tell me, I didn’t think that I could meet you *really*, Sasuke...!”

Karyuu looked happy from the bottom of his heart.

“I was longing for you, Uchiha Sasuke...! Burning for the revenge of his clan, the man that penetrated my ideology, who made even the world his enemy...! I wanted to meet you, I wanted to meet you!”

As Nowaki said, he adored Sasuke. The Sasuke of the time when he was tainted with darkness. He opened both his arms widely to express his commotion.

In response, Sasuke looked at Karyuu bitterly on the contrary.

“Well then youngster, you bastard, you were Karyuu’s comrade!”

While he stopped the blood that was pouring from his flank, suddenly Iou gave him a look of distrust. Apparently he had already forgot he was rescued and so forth.

“Ha... You really are a convenient old man...”

Seeing this, Karyuu muttered quizzically. It looked like they were acquainted.

“Sh-shut up, be quiet, you group of villains. It doesn’t matter anymore, youngster! This guy is the enemy of my daughter! This guy is the ringleader of everyone! Kill this man at once!”

“What the hell are you talking about, old man! Sasuke is the man I yearn for!”

Karyuu’s eyes shone glaring.

“For this reason, I decided to kill Sasuke!”

Saying this, Karyuu joined his hands together.

“I’ll surpass you!!”

Without even listening to Karyuu’s proclamation, Sasuke let the electric current clad the sword he had drawn out, and he aimed at his stomach with the point of the sword.

“Sorry! I won’t let you do that!”

Karyuu formed a hand seal to counterattack.

—Doton: Doryūheki!

Thereupon, suddenly a mud wall gradually rose from the earth. Karyuu made another hand seal.

—Yōton: Gomuheki!

Karyuu arched his chest, and spat out from inside his body something that went adding to the wall that had gradually risen.

“...!”

Sasuke’s sword hit the wall, and the electric current disappeared.

“Gum is resistant against Lightning Release!”

The mud wall was covered by gum. Apparently Karyuu had a kekkei genkai that produced gum, that is the Lava Release.

Karyuu hid behind the wall, and moulded chakra again.

“The boss is getting serious, everyone, go away!”

The men of the Dark Thunder Group got out of the village to escape.

—Yōton: Gomumari!

He performed this jutsu, and spheres of various sizes, similar to the eggs of a bug, were spat out from Karyuu’s mouth. They scattered on the ground. The spheres that had fallen were like the ball-sphere.

“Gah... all right then.”

Karyuu slowly raised both his hands. Thereupon, the ball-spheres floated lightly. On the contrary, he lowered his hands, and the ball-spheres fell down.

Matching the movements of Karyuu’s hands, the ball-spheres sprung or rushed out weirdly.

“...go!”

Karyuu hit the ball-sphere that was right near him with his fist. He turned his body, and stroke another ball-sphere with the back of his hand. He kicked a ball-sphere that hopped in front of him, and at last he grabbed a ball-sphere that was near him and jumped high, and threw it towards Sasuke. Four of them were drawing near Sasuke, each one with a different trajectory.

“...”

However, it wasn’t difficult to read their movements. Sasuke avoided a ball-sphere, and tried to approach Karyuu.

“This is just the beginning!”

Karyuu inferred Sasuke’s movements, and made a hand seal.

“...!?”

Thereupon, the ground under Sasuke’s feet suddenly lifted. Without stopping the earth gradually rose. When he was about to unintentionally loose his balance, a new ball-sphere came jumping. Sasuke turned back, and avoided it twisting his body.

“Not yet!”

Karyuu used Earth Release, and produced one high wall after the other. Then, Karyuu’s ball-spheres, touching the walls, bounced back, and showed a more complex movement. The ball-spheres approached aiming at Sasuke from all directions.

“Chi...”

One of them stroke Sasuke’s thigh. The ball-sphere bounced lightly, but the second it touched him a dull pain ran though him like it had reverberated in his bones. Moulded chakra had been put inside the ball-sphere, and it probably increased its power of damage.

Without change then they made no progress. Sasuke tried to put a genjutsu on Karyuu with his Sharingan.

“Oi man, try aiming at me now!”

“N-nooo, stop iiiit!”

Thereupon, Karyuu grabbed a villager that couldn’t run away having his leg broken, and he pushed him in front of himself. The villager that was used as a shield was screaming. Sasuke quickly diverted his eyes.

“Chi...”

He just said he admired Sasuke, and it seemed that he had investigated thoroughly on him.

Sasuke had tried to get near him and the ball-sphere got in his way, making a bold move he involved a villager. No, maybe he would destroy village and all.

To keep the damages to minimum even the techniques he used were limited.

“Youuu... you’re a damn brute...!”

At the words that Iou yelled instinctively, as he grabbed the villager Karyuu laughed with a *ha*.

“I have no business in being called brute by a brute!”

“What did you...”

Karyuu threw on the ground the villager he was holding, and glared at Iou. Karyuu’s expression, who was fighting cheerfully, became serious all at once.

“The moment the circumstances became bad, you bastard cast us away, are you in any position to talk?”

“N-nnggggg...”

He hadn’t heard of this story from Iou.

However, for Sasuke, now the most important thing wasn’t concentrating himself in their story.

The ball-spheres jumped and flew in massive quantity. If he tried to approach him a wall of Earth Release appeared. The gum of Lava Release countered his electric shocks. And hostages had been taken.

Sasuke’s pupil, the Sharingan, was working restlessly and memorizing this situation. Then, at last, it reflected Iou and the bamboo thicket.

“...”

Sasuke turned his back towards Karyuu.

“Nh, oi!”

‘Where are you going?’, he ignored also the words that Karyuu yelled, and Sasuke entered inside Iou’s house from the wall that had been destroyed.

“...here it is.”

When he could get his hands on the object of his intention, a huge ball-sphere attacked Iou’s house. Sasuke got out immediately, and poured chakra into the object he held in his hand.

“Ha!”

Sasuke, who had jumped over the mud wall that had risen, aimed at Karyuu.

“Haha, I have a gum wall!”

Karyuu just like until now tried to defend himself with the gum wall.

“...!?”

Even so, the mud wall crumbled, having been exposed because the gum had burst open. And not only that. Even the ball-spheres that were around Karyuu exploded all at once.

“W-what’s happening! I don’t know this technique!”

When Karyuu, astonished, lowered his eyes to the ground under his feet, a bamboo skewer was stuck. The bamboo work that Iou produced.

“A bamboo skewer...!? Don’t tell me you made my gum explode with the bamboo skewers with moulded chakra in them!?”

The bamboo work had sharp points. Then it was a diversion.

“...Damn it!”

When Karyuu was taken aback, becoming aware of the hint, he could hear the chirping sound of the Chidori that announced his end.

When he defeated Karyuu, and settled all the men of the Dark Thunder Group who had been spying on the situation from outside the village, also Chino and Nowaki came back leading the villagers.

All the villagers were injured somehow, but luckily there hadn't been casualties.

For the present, the men of the Dark Thunder Group were restricted inside a cellar inside the village.

“Sasuke-chan. It seems that he came to his senses.”

The night had fallen, and when Karyuu came back to his senses Sasuke and the others entered in the cellar.

“...Haha, we look really bad.” Karyuu murmured seeing the tied and restricted figures of his comrades and his own. After that, he looked up to Sasuke, and turned his eyes to Iou. Karyuu laughed at Iou's figure, who had his stomach wrapped in bandages, as to treat him with contempt. At this provocative attitude, Iou became red losing his cool.

“I did tell you to kill this guy! And yet why did you stuff them in this place like this!?”

Iou complained to Sasuke for the situation he wasn't satisfied with. Sasuke looked down on Karyuu, and asked: “You said you were ‘cast away’. What does that mean?”

—The moment the circumstances became bad, you bastard cast us away, are you in any position to talk?

The words that Karyuu spat out to Iou in the middle of the battle. It was a matter Sasuke didn't know about.

“What are you going to do by asking such thing! It doesn't change the fact that these guys are villains!”

“...if you're noisy, you'll go outside. I can't judge a thing I don't know completely.”

At Sasuke's words, Iou gulped firmly.

Karyuu began teasing him with a “Wouldn't it be better to peep with the Sharingan?”, but laughing with a hollow laugh he averted his eyes from Sasuke's eye, who stared at Karyuu in silence.

“...my Lava Release is a kekkei genkai. In Kumogakure, it seems that shinobi who used the Lava Release like me were in a high position in the village, but I was born in a small countryside village. So, whenever a dispute with those people occurred, our clan was put on the foremost lines. We had a special power, so it meant that serving the village was obvious for us. For this reason, everyone died a premature death.”

Karyuu told his own story little by little.

“‘Even I some day will be killed by the village’ I thought, and deserted the village. The village sent a hunter-nin in order to kill me. I escaped from inevitable death, but being driven into a corner, when I thought ‘I cannot run away anymore’, the ‘Lightning Group’ found me.”

It was probably when they were called chivalrous thieves.

“The head of the Lightning Group had a persecuted kekkei genkai just like me. For this reason I said I wanted to become the supporter of the weak. Crushing those guys who did wrongdoings, we distributed the money we ripped off among the poor. ...with this village, right?”

Iou pressed his lips together.

“We were treated like heroes. Each time we showed our figure, those guys of the village welcomed us. They offered us food and lodging. I miss those times.”

It seemed that in those days they had built favourable relationships. So why did they create such tragedy? Karyuu’s story continued.

“Belonging to nowhere, seeing that we were a menace, on the opposite side also shinobi villages appeared, which tried to exploit us. We wasted the sources of funds of the enemy shinobi villages. Also that time was like this. At the time of the previous Mizukage, Kirigakure requested us a service. They said we could attack a man in a high position in a country that squeezed money from the weak.”

Probably it was the period when it was called the Village of the Bloody Mist. The figure of Momochi Zabuza, whom he had faced during a mission of Team Seven, floated on Sasuke’s mind. He was a man who showed him the thirst of blood that shook him with fear.

“For us, Kirigakure was our frequent costumer. However. When we attacked the group of the high executive that was indicated to us by Kirigakure, shinobi of Kirigakure appeared, and they surrounded us, of all things. The Kirigakure shinobi appeared jauntily and rescued the high executive while he was in a tough spot! …or something like that. Kirigakure, to make it up to the high executive, had exploited us.”

Karyuu took a breath with a whiff to curse their own destiny.

“They disposed of us, who knew too much, efficiently, and yet their secret design was to set a connection with the high executive. On the other side, they would be an elite set. While also losing comrades we, who had escaped with the boss’s Ninja Art of Escape, arrived in the Bamboo Village after a great struggle, barely escaping alive. ‘For a short time, let us rest here’ … we said. We had no intention of bothering the village, we intended to leave immediately. The answer returned immediately. … ‘Go somewhere else’.”

The coldness of these words, even Sasuke could feel it. Probably that incident was more than enough to come to know their hopelessness.

“I-if we had hidden you, maybe we would have been damaged too! In the first place, you only distributed the money that you ripped off from other people, how dare you take such proud attitude!”

“I miss it so much… The words that you declared to me, who was begging ‘At any time I’ll have to carry on shoulder my almost dead comrade, let us rest just for a little while, just this guy’! The entrance of the village had been tightly closed, we walked through the bamboo thicket and went towards another village. The comrade I carried on my back died on the way. Any village, any village answered the same way. You bastards didn’t share even a glass of water!”

Karyuu’s eyes were pregnant with hatred. With a glint in his eyes, Iou faltered.

“The boss dispersed the Lightning Group, everyone escaped scattering. I had neither dreams nor aspirations. I was afraid of the Kiri pursuers, for years I lead a shitty life. That’s when, Sasuke, I heard the story of you attacking the Five Kage summit.”

Karyuu narrowed his eyes to remember the fact of that time.

“I was deeply impressed by it. By the picture of you who hadn’t succumb to the destiny of the kekkei genkai, you who lived following your heart’s content. I, I thought I wanted

to become like you. Therefore, gathering new comrades, I formed the Dark Thunder Group. My purpose... revenge!"

"..."

"Also my comrades, that were few at the beginning, increased steadily after the Fourth Great War. Because the shinobi, who lost the employment with the decline of the conflicts and defected their villages, joined me. Then, I had reached enough power... I carried out my revenge. Against the villages that rejected us!"

Thereupon Iou yelled again.

"It may be true, but did you need to kill everyone! There were also men who had nothing to do with this matter! Why, such a cruel thing...!"

"You bastards, you lived happy-looking showing your *stupid faces* without even feeling a hint of sadness... Only that was enough to *sicken* me! So I'll destroy you all!"

An intense killing intent oozed from Karyuu's expression.

"Revenge was fun... the funnier part was when that daughter of you bastard's begged for her life while sobbing!"

"...y-you bastaaaaaaaard!"

While yelling "I kill you!" Iou tried to throw himself at him. Nowaki hurried to stop him.

"...wasn't there another way?"

At Nowaki's words, Karyuu, lowering his eyes, "I had to, I couldn't stand it." answered.

Sasuke stared at the scene bitter. It was as if he was looking at his old self.

Nowaki a little forcibly sent an agitated Iou home. As for Iou's house, a wall had crumbled down, here and there the roof had been destructed, but there was a bed. He would probably be able to rest his body.

"..."

Sasuke left the house, entered the bamboo thicket alone, and finding a rock he sat on it. He fetched the paper of his communication duty, he concisely wrote down what happened in the Bamboo Village, entrusted it to the hawk he summoned, and flew it to Konoha.

Deciding how to deal with the Dark Thunder Group wasn't a problem that Sasuke alone could decide. He thought of asking for Kakashi's judgement, who was the Hokage.

Originally he had acted to investigate the affair of the mass disappearance of shinobi, but until an answer came from Konoha, probably would be impossible for him to leave the Bamboo Village.

Sasuke looked at the sky. Beyond the bamboo leaves, the moon had risen idly.

The connections of hatred revolved around revenge. Probably there was a method to help.

"...it's hard."

These words rushed from his mouth.

Sasuke took a breath, and also in order not to create a tragedy bigger than that, he returned to guard the Dark Thunder Group at least.

II

II

The Village of the Hidden Leaf had suddenly become noisy because of the attack that had occurred.

Anyhow, the purpose of the enemy wasn't clear. Furthermore, from now on there was the possibility that the same incident would occur again. The defence of the village had been strengthened and a characteristic air of tension was running through the village.

Since Ino's injuries, who had used the Shintenshin no Jutsu to save Aoba who had been caught in the genjutsu trap, were bigger than expected, she had to stay hospitalised for several days.

Shikamaru and Chōji went to their childhood friend's hospital room carrying fruit when they went to visit her.

“...ah? Sai?”

“Yo.”

When they entered, Sai was sitting on a chair, sketching, and there was Ino's figure sleeping on the bed.

“What, you've come to see her too?”

They peeped into Sai's sketchbook from behind, and a flower was drawn in it.

Apparently the fresh flower that was stuck in a vase at the window of the hospital room.

“Don't tell me, you brought that?”

“Apparently Ino's mother brought that, so?”

“Ah, aah... really?”

While he was saying ‘Things like flowers aren't suitable for visiting sick people, you know’, Shikamaru put the fruit on the shelf. Then, Shikamaru's eyes suddenly turned to the garbage can nearby.

“...”

“Don't we eat, Shikamaru?”

“Nh? No, Ino's sleeping. Let's wait.”

“Eeh...”

After Chōji dropped his shoulders forlornly, he fetched a banana from inside his clothes and stuffed his cheeks with it. Apparently he had bought it on his own separately. He was the user of a secret ninjutsu too, and he couldn't help but absorb calories or his fat and chakra would decrease.

“However, it turned out a troublesome thing. It's not only Konoha, it's happening the same thing even in Kiri and Kumo.” Shikamaru said while sitting in a spare chair.

The night the shinobi that were under a genjutsu appeared in the Village of the Hidden Leaf, also Kirigakure and Kumogakure fought in the same way.

Since it seemed that the shinobi who had appeared in the other two villages were a mixture of Kiri and Kumo, there had been many shinobi who had exploded.

“But yet, by being able send the information to the other villages, we were able to prevent more damages.”

They shared information through e-mails. There were still many shinobi who opposed to digitalization, but the information that under normal circumstances would arrive in few days could be telecommunicated in a moment.

“Did they say that the manipulated shinobi probably were the people who went missing?”

“But it seems that still they can't say it for sure. I heard that Kiri and Kumo are gonna dispatch new documents, so the investigation proceeds also in Konoha.”

They were able to find a confirm for Tadaichi and the other shinobi from their own village, but they still couldn't know for the other villages.

“The genjutsu is still not lifted...” Chōji said while eating the second banana.

As for the people that were put under a genjutsu, they took into consideration the danger of an explosion, and they had been isolated in a facility not far away from Konoha.

Sakura, playing a central role, was hastening their healing, but they were racking their brain in dealing with the strange chakra that was still circulating inside their bodies.

All the shinobi of the Nara clan and Hyūga clan they had had been stationed, and also Shikamaru had been taking this duty until just now.

“However, Sakura said that the thread end is in sight. …but it’s no use talking about it in a hospital room.”

Now, Ino needed to rest. They couldn’t disturb her by being noisy. Shikamaru stood up, and looked down on Sai, who was sketching the picture of the flower unconcerned without joining that conversation.

“Sai, what do you do?”

“Since it’s my day off, if I can draw a picture that pleases me I’ll go back.”

Sai smiled sweetly at Shikamaru.

It was strange that he was doing a sketch in a hospital room he was supposed to visit, and moreover that he said he would go home if he could draw skilfully.

However, Shikamaru looked at the trash can to understand these words. There also many unfinished sketches had been thrown away.

After they went out of the hospital room, while walking through the hallway Shikamaru grumbled “I don’t understand”.

“You don’t understand, what?”

“No, how can I say….”

When they first met, Sai had made a smiling face without feelings. Some change had occurred in him. You can never know what could happen in life.

Seeing that Shikamaru was evasive, Chōji laughed with a *fufu*.

“Shikamaru, you also said *that*, didn’t you?”

“*That*? What do you mean with *that*?”

“Look, you said ‘Things like flowers’ too, Shikamaru….”

“Never mind, forget it.”

Interrupting what Chōji was trying to say, they went out of the hospital. They narrowed their eyes for the dazzling sunlight, and a hawk passed within their field of vision.

“…”

Shikamaru recalled Sakura’s figure that was dispensing medical treatments without rest.

—Those guys, I wonder what they plan to do.

He remembered about when Danzō had authorised the obliteration of Sasuke, who was a former missing-nin, Sakura’s figure that shed tears with vacant eyes, and he accidentally thought those things.

“…senseless talk.”

“Shikamaru?”

“Nh? No, that’s nothing.”

It was Naruto, who was picking up the documents that just arrived from Kirigakure and Kumogakure, the first one to realise that the hawk was turning straight to the Hokage’s Office.

“Kakashi-sensei, Sasuke’s hawk!”

Naruto dashed at the window, and let Sasuke’s hawk into the room.

“Aah, from Sasuke... it was just right.”

Since the Konoha attack, he had been very busy with village’s matters and the exchange of letters with the other villages etcetera, but he was about to think if he had to get in touch with Sasuke.

Kakashi retrieved the letter from the hawk.

“What does Sasuke say?”

“Apparently he arrested a group of thieves called Dark Thunder Group that were assailing the villages in the Country of the Hot Water. It seems that the head possesses a kekkei genkai...”

Sasuke wrote that he wanted to ask for the Hokage’s decision. Anyhow its actual spot was the Country of Hot Water. Whether to leave the matter to the Village of the Hidden Hotsprings, or take care of it in Konoha, the decision was probably difficult.

“We have to get in touch with the Village of the Hidden Hotsprings...”

Kakashi was forming a plan inside his head.

“As usual, a blunt letter without compliments.”

Naruto’s expression, who was laughing with a *kishishi*, looked somehow happy. Maybe he was pleased by Sasuke’s activity.

“Alright, I won’t lose to him, too ’ttebayo!”

For Naruto, Sasuke would probably be his rival in eternity. He got psyched. He picked up the documents again, and flipped through them.

In the documents, there were the photographic portraits of the shinobi that now were held captive in the recent affair.

If they had been in the old days, such information would probably not have gone around. Each village maybe would have hidden them in order not to leak them into the other villages. While he thought that this cooperation was precisely because the Five Great Countries’s quarrels disappeared, Kakashi reseated on the chair, and tried to write a letter to the Village of the Hidden Hotsprings.

Thereupon, Naruto titled his neck with a “Nnh...?”.

“What’s wrong, Naruto?”

“...he’s the only one who’s not in the documents.”

“Not in the documents? What do you mean?”

“Among the manipulated shinobi, there is a shinobi who’s the only one who’s not in the documents dattebayo!”

Naruto had only given a quick look to the documents, but he stated so. Naruto was rough but sometimes he was also smart. In fact, there were also many things linked to the thread end of the solution.

“Naruto, won’t you give me your confirm that you guessed right?”

At Kakashi’s words Naruto said “Understood ’ttebayo!” and jumped out of the window he had left open.

Medical equipment had been brought to the facility that was a little detached from the village, and medical shinobi had been assigned to deal with the alert twenty-four hour.

“...Naruto?”

He went inside, and Sakura, who was continuing the medical treatment, noticed him right away. Tiredness was evident in her expression. Besides being entrusted with their lives, if

she made one wrong step an explosion would happen, and that situation was not unlikely to produce many victims. Probably she couldn't divert her attention even for a second. Immediately after Sakura, there was the face of another trusted person.

“Naruto-kun.”

“Hinata. So, today you keep guard.”

As she said “That, too, but...”, Hinata looked at Sakura.

“Just now we tried a thing, I borrowed the power of Byakugan. Apart from that, what were you doing?”

“Aah, as a matter of fact I was looking at the documents of the guys who went missing, but...”

He told them the existence of the shinobi who wasn't in the documents.

“...I see. By the way, which one was it?”

Sakura looked around the room that was attentively taken under her control.

“Err...”

Hoping to find an answer, Naruto looked at each shinobi of the room one person at a time.

“This guy.”

When he finally found him, he was a man in the latter half of his twenties. For some reason, he was in the room detached from the other shinobi. Listening to Naruto's words, Sakura changed her expression at once.

“What's wrong?”

“...this person, if compared to the other shinobi the amount of strange chakra that circulates in his body was few. Therefore, when we tried the procedure of getting rid of it, after it seemed that we were close to success but...”

Sakura said that Hinata made her aware of the situation of the strange chakra that circulated inside his body, and apparently they removed the chakra with Sakura's medical ninjutsu without opening a wound.

“However, the fact that only this person is not in the documents... Don't tell me that he's connected with the ringleader.”

Listening to Sakura's words, Hinata firmly looked at the man's body.

“From that point of view, we might be able to understand the fact that only in this person the strange chakra is few... Therefore only this person doesn't need to be manipulated.”

Sakura took a breath to calm her heart down, and looked at the man.

“...I will keep giving medical treatments without change.”

“I understand dattebayo.”

Sakura's beliefs were those of a medical ninja. If she were successful, she would be able to save even the other shinobi.

Sakura restarted her medical treatments, and after he finished transmitting this case to Kakashi, Naruto coming back again watched over the medical treatments. Sweat beaded Sakura's and Hinata's foreheads.

“This is the last... I've reached the brachial artery...”

“Got it.”

Hearing Hinata's words, who had followed the chakra stream, Sakura, stiffening, placed both hands in the man's right elbow and firmly put her strength in it. Sakura's chakra arrived inside the man's body, in the blood vessels, and it arrested the problematic chakra.

“...”

While paying careful attention not to make any injury, they extinguished this chakra. Sakura looked at Hinata to ask a confirm. Hinata looked through all over the man's body, and nodded firmly. They had pulled out all the strange chakra that circulated inside the man's body.

“Both of you, thank you very much dattebayo!”

At Naruto's words Sakura laughed cheerfully, and Hinata acted shyly.

“However, what do we do from here? Did Kakashi-sensei say something?”

Naruto said “Wait a second!” to Sakura who asked this while wiping her sweat, and went out of the room.

“O-i, we made it ‘ttebayo!” Naruto shouted, and Aoba, who had lost consciousness because he had suffered from the genjutsu trap and probably had barely recovered, entered.

“Aoba-san, are you feeling all right?”

At Sakura's words Aoba answered “I'm fine, thank you.” adjusting his sunglasses.

“However, what are you doing here?”

“I asked the Hokage that I wanted to self-challenge myself again.”

“Challenge... you mean reading the information again?”

“Yeah.”

Maybe even Aoba couldn't withdraw at this rate.

“Well... the chakra inside the body is all removed, but the genjutsu trap might remain...”

Aoba answered “It's ok.” to worried-looking Hinata.

“Anyhow, I already experienced it once, so I memorised also the triggering feeling of the genjutsu trap. So if it looks dangerous I'll sneak away.”

He felt just a little insecure, but he had already experienced it once so the next time it will go smoothly for sure. Moreover, they needed to investigate urgently how the man who wasn't in the documents was concerned in this affair.

“Well then, I'm going.”

Aoba's hand reached out the man's forehead, and jumped into his consciousness.

“...alright.”

He went inside and opened his eyes, and this time a huge brain was enshrined in it.

Aoba examined the situation of the surroundings, but the red sea that had swallowed him wasn't there.

“...this time for sure.”

Without loosening his vigilance he inserted his hand inside the brain.

A scene began appearing. It was night. The man was standing on a rock cliff stricken by waves.

He immediately became wary, but it looked like an ordinary sea.

A thin young man was standing in front of the man. The man called this young man ‘Boss’. The young man that was called boss wasn't turned towards his direction.

‘...it has been a long time since the Lightning Group dissolved.’ the man muttered as if he was speaking to himself.

‘That guy Karyuu, who formed the new so called Dark Thunder Group, it seems that he acts violently. Maybe the grudge of that guy is towards those guys of the village. ...After all we can't live in a honest way...’

The sound of the waves breaking on the shore faded. Regret ran through the man's face.

‘I want to say *farewell* to this world soon. However... if I die it’s because I take revenge on the shinobi...!’

The man’s fist trembled all over. Revenge against the shinobi. It was impossible that shinobi of Kiri and Kumo would say such things. Clearly this man was one of the culprits who caused the incident.

‘...Amuda.’

Then, for the first time, the young man called boss emitted some words. Amuda, probably it was the name of the owner of these memories.

‘Are you going to die for the plan?’

Amuda nodded at the words of the boss.

‘It’s natural. Finally I’ll shoot up fireworks!’

Listening to these words, the boss slowly turned around.

‘Amuda. I’ll make a good use of your death—’

The young man was the ringleader. Aoba was convinced of this. He strained his eyes, and tried to see the face of the companion.

“...!?”

However, the wide blue sea suddenly changed its colour. Not only the sea, but the sky too, and every tree started turning all red.

“That’s bad!”

Aoba, panicking, escaped from inside the opponent’s consciousness.

“Aoba-san!”

“Are you all right?”

He detached his hand from the man’s, Amuda’s, forehead, and Sakura and Hinata rushed over to Aoba, who had retreated as if to escape.

“Again a genjutsu trap... To read his mind further, it would have been difficult not to spend time and efforts... However this time I got my hands on some information.”

“Really! You discovered the enemy!?”

Aoba, while adjusting his breath, said “The name of this guy is Amuda. He wants revenge against the shinobi.”

“Revenge against the shinobi...?”

“Uh-huh.”

So that’s why they attacked the villages.

“Moreover, there was the boss of this guy. Originally, it seems that he was in an organization called Lightning Group.”

“Lightning Group..., if we check up we’ll understand, I wonder.”

Aoba continued.

“Later, it seems that his comrade, who had left, acted under the name of Dark Thunder Group.”

“...Dark Thunder Group!?” Naruto shouted instinctively.

“What, do you know them?”

“...No, I don’t know them.”

“What! You made me hope so!” Sakura yelled while showing her fist, with a vein rising in her temple.

“No, but I remember I heard something like that...”

Naruto held his forehead with his finger scratching it, trying to remember.

“Naruto-kun... did you hear this story from someone...?” Hinata asked hesitantly, and Naruto connected the memories together with a *ha*.

“Sasuke!”

“Ha!? How did Sasuke-kun turn up here!”

“The letter from Sasuke! Sasuke’s hawk came at Kakashi-sensei’s place, and then, in the letter, he wrote that he defeated a group of thieves called Dark Thunder Group!”

III

When they were attacked by the Dark Thunder Group, many villagers sustained some damages, and in the Bamboo Village, which had lost houses, the duty of the reconstruction proceeded thanks to the villagers that could move.

They used the bamboo that grew plentifully in the surroundings, and they filled up the holes that were opened in the houses by Karyuu’s attacks.

It seemed that the villagers who savoured the panic of death were now thankful for being alive.

Meanwhile, Iou secluded himself in his house and hadn’t emerged yet.

“...what a muzzy face. Are you okay?”

The sun had set, and while the villagers had went to bed, Sasuke was making sure if there wasn’t something wrong inside the cellar in which the Dark Thunder Group was taken into custody. Then Chino talked to him.

Chino, and Nowaki too, remained in the village since they had been dragged into this, and they had taken part in the reconstruction.

“...”

“Are you ignoring me again?”

After Chino shook her head with a ‘no way, no way’, she threw him something with a *pon*. Thinking what was it, he accepted it: it was a rice ball.

“Nowaki said ‘Go give it to Sasuke’.”

Chino finished her task and waving her hand went back.

“Oi.”

“My name isn’t ‘Oi’!”

Sasuke told Chino, who had looked back despite being offended, “...send him my thanks”.

After staring at him blankly, Chino answered “Roger that”.

After Chino left, Sasuke recomposed his face. He wondered if he had a muzzy face as she had said.

Sasuke went out in the bamboo thicket to keep a distance with the village, and sat down on the back of a tree trunk that had fixed its thick roots on the earth.

Sasuke was thinking about the recent affair.

Karyuu said he had formed the Dark Thunder Group after seeing Sasuke’s figure. There were men who steeped into wickedness imitating Sasuke’s conduct when he was tainted with darkness. And in addition to that, it may have formed a sort of chain of hatred.

Atonement—a trip to redeem my sins. However, he wondered if he could make it up for his whole life, if he committed mistakes once.

The Village of the Hidden Leaf came to Sasuke’s mind. However, he couldn’t image his own figure that spends his life stepping on Konoha’s soil.

Maybe this trip was going to be endless.

“...young lass.”

When Chino went back to Iou’s home, Iou, who had secluded himself in a room inside, showed his figure sitting on a chair talking with Nowaki.

“Grampa, are you all right after what happened?”

“...what will become of them?”

“Them?”

“The Dark Thunder Group... how did they deal with Karyuu?”

Probably Iou couldn’t think of anything but this thing.

“...After the Fourth Shinobi World War, the conflicts decreased, and apparently also the shinobi of the Five Great Countries became tolerant towards various things. And among them there’s the Village of the Hidden Leaf... I heard that Sasuke’s village is compassionate.”

“...it’s difficult to say, but as for Karyuu’s circumstances, there’s a part of me that can pity him, as a shinobi ... Also Kirigakure’s affair is involved so...”

“He won’t be killed?”

For Iou, this point only was important. Chino answered vaguely “Probably”.

“...is that so...”

Iou said “I’ll go get some night wind”, and went out of the house.

“...nh?”

Sasuke was resting in the bamboo thicket, but he lifted his head hearing the sound of flapping wings of the bird he grew accustomed to. Apparently, the hawk he had sent to Konoha was returning. Probably they had decided how to deal with the Dark Thunder Group.

“No, it’s soon for that...”

Sasuke retrieved the letter from the hawk that had perched on his shoulder. Then he looked at the contents.

“...what.”

In the letter there was written that Konoha underwent an attack, that the affair of the disappearance of few days ago was connected with it, that there was a shinobi among the attackers that seemed to be one of the masterminds, and then that this shinobi belonged to the organization called formerly Lightning Group, and was acquainted with a man called Karyuu of the Dark Thunder Group.

“Lightning Group... the name of the chivalrous thieves’ group in which Karyuu was at the beginning.”

They said that there were high probabilities that the leader of this Lightning Group was the ringleader. For that reason, they wanted to hear the information from Karyuu and the others of the Dark Thunder Group. If he used the Sharingan he probably would be able to procure the information easily.

The most concerning thing was the genjutsu that he could put on the shinobi and the explosion that he could set. They said that he could put people under a genjutsu, and the number of shinobi that appeared in Konoha, Kiri and Kumo was over a hundred. The manipulation of only that quantity at once wasn’t an ordinary thing.

Apparently a man of the conspirators called Amuda had penetrated, but he was probably just a guide.

Probably there was one too among the men that attacked Kiri and Kumo, but being one after the other, they must have quickly blown themselves up.

Mixing the shinobi of their own village and the shinobi of different villages in the attack was a measure to not be recognised.

Konoha had probably been able to discover him because they saved everyone except the Konoha shinobi who were under the genjutsu.

It was a technique combined with a genjutsu. What kind of jutsu in the world were they using?

Or it meant that somewhere they changed the shinobi they captured into their own soldiers, and sent them out?

“...!”

Sasuke was taken aback. In this case, it was completely like Kaguya.

The figure of the White Zetsu connected to the Shinju floated across his mind.

“No, I’m overthinking it...”

Anyhow now he had to start to pull out information on the Lightning Group from Karyuu. Sasuke promptly got up.

“...?”

Ban, a sound similar to something popping could be heard in Sasuke’s ears.

Apparently flames were rising up from the village. Don’t tell me that Karyuu and the others escaped from the cellar? Sasuke went immediately back to the village.

“...this...”

However, the scene that spread in front of his eyes was different from Sasuke’s guess. The cellar of the village was burning. Fire columns, which had been fanned also with oil, had risen and were burning wrapping the whole cellar.

The bamboo that had been employed for the cellar was heating up, and was cracking making a bursting noise.

“What’s happening!”

At his wit’s end, Sasuke noticed Chino and Nowaki looking at the burning cellar, and ran over them.

“Sa-sasuke-chan. Apparently, when we took our eyes off him, Grampa Iou set the fire.” Chino made a bitter expression.

“What... what happened to Iou?”

“Probably, he’s also...”

Chino pointed at the cellar. She meant that Iou went inside the cellar, scattered the oil, and set all together on fire.

“...the treatment of the Dark Thunder Group, he asked it.” Chino muttered sighing.

“I told him the Dark Thunder Group wouldn’t be killed. And when I answered that they might not kill Karyuu because Konoha was indulgent with the shinobi, he...”

Sasuke chewed thoroughly his lips with a silent curse and looked at the cellar.

There’s nothing he could do anymore.

Finally the fire extinguished, and they checked inside, but Chino said when they looked down on the corpses, they had burned black at the point that they couldn’t recognise which was Karyuu and which Iou.

“I should have killed the whole Dark Thunder Group myself.”

These words cast a black shadow over Sasuke’s heart.

Sasuke Shinden

Chapter 3: Cheerful shouts of affection, thunderous roars of grief

I

Karyuu had belonged to the Lightning Group. He said that they accepted commissions also from the shinobi villages.

In the villages' case, probably they were illegal connections. If they were dirty matters, there was well-informed man.

Sasuke went alone towards a hideout that had been set up in a cave to ward off the public gaze.

The Bamboo Village had made it through that fire, and seemed somehow relieved. The whole Dark Thunder Group that tormented them had died. And the village headman was the one who achieved it. Maybe everyone was somehow glad that Iou's revenge had been successful.

In the same way he had sent the letter to Sasuke, Kakashi sent a letter also to Yugakure. Probably he wrote that he wanted them to assist the Bamboo Village, and thanks to this Yugakure shinobi appeared to help with the reconstruction.

Chino and Nowaki said that finally they had been let go and went back to travelling, and Sasuke came here.

“...this is going to give me quite some troubles.”

When he got closer to the hideout, a man suddenly blocked Sasuke's way. It was a known face.

“Sasuke... it's you. Let me introduce myself, I'm ‘Yamato’.”

He was the man who had entered Orochimaru's hideout with Naruto and the others in the past. He had been appointed as their captain. That man was here now. So that meant that *he* was.

“Looks like Orochimaru is here.”

Orochimaru had bigger hideouts, but he had no doubt he was here. Yamato inhaled with a *fuu*.

“I give up. Will you tell me your business?”

“I have some business with Orochimaru.”

“Well, I worked that much out for myself.”

“...”

“...”

“...”

Sasuke was silent. Also Yamato crossed his arms and sank into silence. Probably he intended to wait thoroughly. In that case, the conversation was going to make no progress.

“...It's possible that Orochimaru has some information related to the ringleader of the attack that occurred in Konoha.”

He briefly explained him the situation, and Yamato seemed disappointed. He unfolded his crossed arms, and scratched his head.

“Did you get in contact with the Sixth for this matter?”

“If this gives results, I intend to report to him.”

“Well, it'd be better if you send your progresses en route in detail, it's easy to take connection even if we're here but...”

Yamato looked at Sasuke steadily.

“But, you’re doing it for Konoha’s sake, right?”

At Yamato’s question, he had trouble breathing for a moment.

He was doing it for Konoha’s sake, that’s true. He was doing it so naturally that it sounded strange even to him.

Even if he didn’t stay in the village, he was concerned with Konoha. He had such feeling.

“...yeah.”

At Sasuke’s reply, Yamato let him through saying “It can’t be helped.”

“...is it ok?”

“I’ll report to the Sixth. Because you’re my ‘comrade’. Trust and importance of teamwork, did Kakashi-san taught them to you, too?”

Kakashi, Team 7. The memory of those times was brought back to Sasuke’s mind.

Again he felt like he was gathering from the start important things that he had thrown away.

“...thank you.”

Saying this, Sasuke walked into Orochimaru’s hideout.

In the walls that vividly reminded him of a snake’s skin, artworks of snakes were used to decorate the place he arrived to. Probably those also served as a surveillance camera.

Orochimaru must have seen him, too.

“It’s been a while, Sasuke-kun.”

He proceeded silently, and before he reached the depths of the hideout Orochimaru showed up with a smile floating on his mouth.

Orochimaru was the man who was called, along with Jiraiya and Tsunade, the legendary three, and the depth of his knowledge on ninjutsu and his spirit of persistent quest exceeded every other shinobi’s.

His tenacity was snake-like, he had experienced the abyss of darkness, and there was a part of him that transcended humanity.

“Do you know the ‘Lightning Group’?” he asked without beating about the bush, and Orochimaru muttered “Ah.”

“You know them?”

“Oh, I’ve heard of them. Though I heard that in the end they’ve been ‘suppressed’ by Kirigakure.”

Orochimaru laughed snickering. Apparently he had come to know that Kirigakure framed the Lightning Group to create a connection with the high executive.

“There’s the possibility that the head of this Lightning Group is attacking the shinobi villages.”

“Really, the head of the Lightning Group...”

Sasuke’s expression became stern for the tone of voice he was using.

“If you know something about it, spit it out.”

“Fufu... You’re the same as ever... Is that the attitude you use when you ask something to a person?”

Sasuke urged Orochimaru, who had bent his head in question: “Do it quickly”.

Orochimaru made an even wider smile and answered “Okay”.

“This situation became somehow amusing... If I remember correctly the head of the Lightning Group was the owner of a kekkei genkai, and at the beginning he was supposed to be in the group of guards of Oyashiro’s place.”

“Oyashiro’s place...?”

He had never heard of that name.

“He’s a man who belongs to nowhere. While he’s a shinobi, that man is also an arms dealer. Since he would sell weapons on large scale to anyone as long as he can pile up money, he’s called merchant of death. He was very skilled in amassing enormous fortunes in his lifetime.”

“And that guy was his guard?”

“He was also a guard, but he provided arms in the battlefields together with Oyashiro. The elites, too, come out in the foremost lines of the battle. He was also close to the Anbu.”

In that case, if he went asking Oyashiro the story he would probably get closer to the head of the Lightning Group.

“Where’s Oyashiro?”

“Come on now. Apparently he has more hideouts than I do. So it may be difficult to go in search for him.”

Sasuke scowled at Orochimaru, glaring.

“It’s impossible that you told me such unsubstantiated talk so expressly.”

At Sasuke’s words, Orochimaru purred with a *kuku*.

“You trusted me? Oh well. I don’t know where he is, but I can lure him out. But moreover... will it be difficult?”

‘Will you do it despite this?’ Orochimaru was asking him.

“What do you think I came here for.”

At Sasuke’s answer, Orochimaru muttered “I feel the wind.” and smiled again.

The preparations would take little time.

Orochimaru had said so, and Sasuke waited in the hideout for a short while.

“Sasuke!”

“What, what kind of evildoings are you planning by coming here?”

“...Long time no see.”

Thereupon, the members of Taka that once fought with him rushed over to him.

“Looks like Karin has sensed you early on, she was all having ants in her pants.”

“No! It’s only because I was worried that some problem had happened! Don’t say things at your convenience!”

Just like in the old times Karin began arguing with Suigetsu. While looking at those two arguing back and forth, Jūgo asked him about his present condition “Are you still on your journey?”

“...yeah.”

Hearing Sasuke’s words, Karin, who was making a fuss, instinctively shut her mouth.

“Didn’t you go back to Konoha?”

She asked him as if she was worried about something, but Suigetsu butted in “You can’t help but caring about Sasuke’s things, don’t you?”

“Seriously, shut up, bastard!”

They nearly started arguing again, when Orochimaru appeared.

“You two, shut up. Sasuke-kun, the arrangements are set. Let’s go.”

“Orochimaru-sama, are you going out anywhere?”

Orochimaru smiled broadly at Karin’s question.

“I’m going with Sasuke-kun to the sea for a little while.”

At Orochimaru's words, Karin and the others sank into silence for a second.

"Eh-eeh? To the sea with Sasuke...?"

"You look after the place."

Being told to hold back, Karin dropped her shoulders. "I can't imagine something like the sea with Orochimaru-sama." Suigetsu stiffened.

"Wait, this is new to me, too."

Sasuke scowled as he followed Orochimaru, who had volunteered.

"To be accurate, a solitary island that floats on the sea. Over there, there's the amusement place of rich people."

"...is Oyashiro there?"

"If he took the bait."

Orochimaru gave him a suggestive smile.

After Sasuke left, Suigetsu said "Sasuke working for other people's sake...", looking somehow moved.

"Originally he was a Konoha shinobi. Probably they're not just strangers."

"Even so" Suigetsu exclaimed at Jūgo's words.

"He didn't go back to Konoha. Doesn't he feel like staying yet?"

At Suigetsu's doubt, Karin said "You don't understand." and scowled at Suigetsu.

"They say that the huge wars disappeared, but there are probably many dangerous rascals. Since Sasuke has those eyes, there are also guys who target him."

He had the Sharingan in his right eye, as a survivor of the Uchiha clan, and even the Rinnegan in his left eye. Sasuke's eyes were the most desirable feature for men who wanted power. That's why Orochimaru wanted Sasuke's body, once.

"If Sasuke stayed in the village, probably some shinobi who would attack the village aiming at him would appear. So by spreading around the voice that 'Uchiha Sasuke isn't in Konoha, he's constantly wandering around the world', they decrease the possibilities of harm occurring to the village."

"If he were very close to the village, maybe some guys would appear, trying to draw out information from people connected with Sasuke."

At Jūgo's adjunct, Suigetsu said "All of them, I mean the guys connected with Sasuke, must be all strong like a fool, right? They won't let information be extracted from them easily." and tilted his head in contemplation.

"It's not only this. If he were in the village, he would also come face to face with very young children. Probably there would be guys who would try to extract information even from these children."

As Jūgo said, in this world there were also shinobi who could go as far as becoming inhumane to achieve their goals. They didn't know what they would use.

"There are also guys who adored Uchiha Itachi, Orochimaru-sama's object of research, and bear a grudge towards Sasuke because he killed Itachi. He's probably trying his best not to leave behind information in the village."

"I wonder if Sasuke thinks of so many various things to this extent."

At Karin's words, Suigetsu was somehow half in doubt.

"I'm not sure, but if it's so, is Sasuke going to travel all the time?"

At Suigetsu's words, Jūgo answered "It may be so."

Hearing this, Karin lowered her eyes.

The image of that girl, shedding tears while she witnessed Sasuke deserting the village and approaching to darkness and yet she couldn't help but think about him, crossed Karin's mind.

“...”

Karin entered in her room and fetched a photo from inside her desk. Once, when they moved as Taka, Karin took it by force, extorting it. She had wanted to take the photo with just the two of them, but Suigetsu and Jūgo were there, too.

Karin was staring at this photo motionlessly.

“...What are you looking at?”

Thereupon, Suigetsu peeped at it indelicately from behind Karin's back.

“...fuck you, idiot! You have no tact!”

“Gah!”

Karin gave a backfist blow to Suigetsu's face. Suigetsu's face liquefied and water splashed around. Karin yelled flustered while adjusting her glasses.

“Nothing, I was just thinking that maybe they don't even have one photo!”

“They? They who? Sasuke?”

“Sasuke? Ah, no... Shut up!!”

She kicked him flying again with all her strength.

“Get out, moron!”

Karin threw Suigetsu out of the room hitting him with a kick, and sending him flying.

When Suigetsu's presence was far away, she looked at the photo again.

“...if we meet again, I could ask her... I can easily make at least a photocopy.”

But she didn't know how she'd meet with that cherry blossom haired girl again. Karin closed the photo in the desk.

II

They boarded a boat from the nearest harbour, and they moved into an even smaller boat from the island they finally arrived at.

As they advanced, all around them was enveloped by mist, and their field of vision decreased. The boatman was rowing the boat without speaking, as if he was accustomed to it.

“...however, it's strange that you can move in this way as you please.” Sasuke said while staring at the prow of the boat that advanced inside the mist. He had tried to destroy Konoha and assassinated the Fourth Kazekage. And besides these things, Orochimaru had committed various serious crimes.

“Oh, Sasuke-kun, you're one to talk?” Orochimaru replied while gazing at the waves stirred by the wind. As Orochimaru said, legally speaking also Sasuke should have been imprisoned for life.

“Besides, even Kabuto, who is one of the war criminals of the Fourth Shinobi World War, is living in the outside world now, right?”

Yakushi Kabuto was Orochimaru's right-hand man, and in order to know what kind of person he was he had kept storing one thing after another inside his body.

By means of the Edo Tensei, a Kinjutsu he performed, the ninja world was about to follow the way of destruction. Not to mention his actions, the lives he stole, all the crimes that were allowed.

Probably there were people who hated Kabuto's past actions, so there must have been people anxious about Kabuto's future. If he had been left alive, he could have made the same mistakes again.

"Though, if compared with me, the probability that Kabuto runs into evil is lower."

"Why are you stating this?"

"Fufu... You don't trust Uchiha Itachi's power?"

Sasuke kept silent.

Itachi, who had been resurrected by Kabuto's Edo Tensei no Jutsu, had fought against Kabuto to dispel this jutsu. That time, he had used Izanami on Kabuto. This jutsu made him look at himself over and over again, so that it wouldn't dispel until he accepted his own self.

However, for Sasuke, who had seen how strong he was, it was hard to imagine how Kabuto had broken out of that Izanami.

"Despite appearances, even Kabuto had a person with whom he shared a bond. That probably became the guide that dispelled the jutsu."

"A person with whom he shared a bond?"

"Right. She's the woman who rescued Kabuto when he was a war orphan."

Sasuke, who didn't know about Kabuto's past, was surprised by this.

"At the beginning she was a Konoha shinobi, and then she was enrolled by the 'Root', and she became one of the elite of the Intelligence Division. For someone from 'Root', she possessed an unusual integrity... But she left the 'Root', and went working in an orphanage. Kabuto was there."

"..."

"Kabuto wanted so much to be helpful for her and this orphanage, and he had been dragged into the war. But his fate was sealed when he caught my eyes."

Orochimaru said this without flinching.

"As a result, Kabuto was burdened with Konoha's darkness, and it was arranged that he would kill her, whom he loved dearly and looked up to, with his own hands. From there on, he became my faithful subordinate. He managed to do any filthy thing with composure. However, when later on he gathered up and used all those well-known shinobi for the Edo Tensei no Jutsu, apparently he didn't try to get in contact only with her. He could have used her power as a shinobi as much as he liked. Maybe Kabuto's feelings as a human were all condensed there."

—He looks like my past self.

His older brother's voice was brought back to Sasuke's memory. Itachi had said this after he put Kabuto under Izanami. Itachi said that both he and Kabuto had been toyed with by the world of shinobi.

—I want Kabuto to realise this before he dies, unlike me.

Sasuke hadn't thought that Kabuto and Itachi were similar. Even now, he couldn't think that they were similar.

However, he could imagine that it was for Kabuto a pain that only Kabuto himself understood.

"It hadn't been transmitted to Kabuto, but she always thought about Kabuto, too. Maybe inside Izanami he became aware of this love of her."

He wondered what kind of path in the world Kabuto would walk on from now on. Probably this woman, who was so important for him, illuminated the way he would go ahead of.

“Besides... maybe it’s also an insurance for when a thing that can’t be dealt with normal methods happen.”

“Insurance...?”

“In every epoch there are dissidents. And when it happens, inhuman powers like ours are necessary. Because there are things that just can’t be protected by doing the ‘right thing’. If it’s the case, it’s better for both sides if we are domesticated...”

Saying things to that extent, Orochimaru laughed with a *fu*.

“...what’s up?”

“That friend of yours, such strategy is not in his head at all.”

Probably he meant Naruto.

“Of course.”

Orochimaru smiled broadly at Sasuke’s reply.

“Well... it has come in sight.”

Orochimaru raised his eyes. In front of the boat, an island surrounded by a precipitous cliff began to appear from the middle of the mist they had slipped into.

The boatman entered in a small cave, which had been built in this cliff. The boat proceeded inside the island, and when the sky opened a harbour appeared.

“Weelcomeeee!”

Thereupon, a man who wore a dazzling outfit appeared to greet them. Extravagant-looking buildings were lined up randomly in the island, and also the people who went back and forth were dressed up showily. That luxuriantly atmosphere looked fake from an outsider’s point of view.

“Here it is the ‘solitary island that doesn’t appear even in the maps’.”

Saying this, Orochimaru advanced between the buildings. Thereupon, a dome-shaped structure that noticeably stood out came in sight.

“...an arena...?”

“This place is called ‘Colosseum’.”

They took place in the guest seating, and a person that looked like a promoter appeared in the middle of the Colosseum.

“Thanks everybody for coming today! Glory for the winner, despair for the loser! The rules are simple, you only make your contender and the opponent’s contender fight! It’s a survival-of-the-fittest simple style, in which the victorious side can obtain them both.”

It was turning out to be a somehow suspicious thing.

“...what’s going on, Orochimaru?”

“It’s exactly how it has been explained. The people who are here make the shinobi they hired fight, and if they win they can obtain the shinobi contender.”

“Don’t tell me that this is the amusement spot of rich people.”

As he expressed his disgust, the battle began. The cheers of the excited millionaires increased.

“It’s just like a show, isn’t it...”

Fufu, Orochimaru laughed.

“Sasuke-kun, I wonder if you remember the Chūnin exam? Also that, so to speak, was a miniature copy of war, it was also a place that promoted, inside and outside, to what

extent the shinobi villages trained excellent shinobi, and how much war potential they have. Here it's the same."

Orochimaru's eyes looked at the audience.

"They show that they have the assets to hire only excellent shinobi. The millionaires that are here are the dark side of society. They flaunt their power, they try to influence everything to their favour by keeping their authority. Come to think of it, apparently also Gatō of the Gatō Maritime Transports Company was a regular costumer."

It was the name of the man that once had the Land of Waves under his thumb. Sasuke remembered that man's foul nature. Also among the millionaires that were here probably there were many people like Gatō. He felt disgusted by them once again.

"However, Oyashiro En shows up nowhere but here, more or less. Moreover, he doesn't appear unless he wants the contender."

Meanwhile, apparently the match was being settled. The shinobi that fought left, and the moderators shouted the names of the following competition out loud.

"Well then, next one, against Oyashiro En's Futsu, Orochimaru's Sasukeeeeeee!"

Hearing this, he stiffened in an instant.

"...what's the meaning of this."

"He swallowed the bait."

"I'm asking what's the meaning of this."

Orochimaru's smile didn't change because of Sasuke, who was irritated. No, instead it looked even more amused.

"I told you, Oyashiro doesn't show up if he doesn't want the contender. That guy, he's a kekkei genkai collector."

"Kekkei genkai collector...?"

"Yeah. He's a person who likes rare things. In your case, Sasuke-kun, since you possess the Sharingan, he wants you desperately."

Apparently with 'bait' he meant Sasuke.

"If you know he was inside a meeting place, shouldn't you just have looked for him?"

"Oyashiro doesn't divulge where he is because he's a wary man. He's a medical nin. It's a good guess saying that he's at Kabuto's level. Of course, he can easily erase not only his appearance, but also his scent. However, he has to come out in the place of assignment of the contenders after the end of the match. It's a conventional practice here."

It seemed that he couldn't help but fight here to meet him. Sasuke clicked his tongue.

"Uh-oh, is he defaulting...?"

Oyashiro hadn't revealed his shinobi contender as if he was waiting for his move. Sasuke scowled at Orochimaru and saying "I'll end it immediately." he jumped into the arena. With Sasuke's arrival, the excitement on the ground rose.

"..."

In response to this, steam appeared above the arena, and changed into a human shape. The one who appeared was a young boy in his late teens. Oyashiro's shinobi, Futsu.

"Well then, begin!"

At the signal, Futsu closed the distance right away. His hands quickly formed a seal, and just as soon as his cheeks puffed out, a substance similar to mist was spat out from his mouth.

"...!"

Sasuke jumped backwards in order not to be struck by that. It smelled faintly of acid.

“I see, a kekkei genkai collector...”

Sasuke, who had opened the distance, looked at Futsu.

“A Skilled Mist Technique of Futton.”

“,,,! How...”

Since this kekkei genkai was rare, the knowledge related to this jutsu tended to run short.

Many would have the upper hand if they made the first move aiming at that. So that's probably why Futsu had immediately attacked him.

“I personally experienced this technique in the past.”

However, Sasuke knew this technique. This was acid mist that melted even people.

Before, when it happened that he fought with the Mizukage, Terumi Mei, she had utilised this technique. The Mizukage had showed that it melted even Sasuke's Susanoo.

However, this jutsu of Futsu's wasn't as powerful as the Mizukage's. In this case, there was nothing to worry about.

“...!”

Now Sasuke closed the distance he had opened. Futsu was frightened as if he was fearing the eyes of someone who wasn't Sasuke, and again tried to release the Skilled Mist Technique.

—No need to show him my Sharingan.

Above all, his pride didn't allow him to reveal his Sharingan in this vulgar space.

“Katon: Gōkakyū no Jutsu!”

Incandescent flames flew out of Sasuke's mouth. The flames, though simple, overpowered the opponent's mist, and gulped Futsu down.

“Aaaaargh!” Futsu shrieked for Sasuke's flames and his mist that had backfired.

“The winner is, Sasuke!”

As Sasuke had proclaimed, he ended it immediately. The people in charge of the Colosseum began taking care of Futsu. Apparently there was also a medical unit. Probably they didn't go until someone was seriously injured.

“Sasuke-san, great job. Come, this way.”

Urged by a person in charge, Sasuke proceeded to the inner part of the arena. On the way, he came together with Orochimaru.

“As I expected.”

“Humph.”

The room he was led to was extravagant to the extreme. Splendid furnishings were lined up.

He was offered a chair by a person in charge, but he awaited standing up, and a man entered a little later.

“So baaad, and I that only participated thinking that I could see the Sharingan at least by a glance! No way, he didn't even use it!”

His opponent was an arms dealer. He had thought that the man that would come would be obviously shady like Gato, but contrary to his expectation the man was bright. He seemed in his forty. He was tall, and he had a well-featured face but his eccentric stylish sunglasses ruined that.

“That's very bad, Orochimaru-san. Furthermore, I have participated for the first time in years. If he defeats him that quickly, also my honour is completely ruined, right?”

Although he was complaining, the man was speaking mockingly. The man moved his focus to Sasuke, and smiled sweetly.

“Hello~. I’m Oyashiro En. Nice to meet you.”

Oyashiro stretched his hand hoping that Sasuke would shake it, but Sasuke didn’t reward him. Even so, he laughed amused.

“Is this guy really Oyashiro En?”

He was very different from what he had imagined, but Orochimaru answered “That’s right.”

“Oh my. I have to free-trade my precious Futsu~. Well then, in the contract...”

“You don’t need to do it.”

Sasuke stopped Oyashiro, who was trying to apply a seal to a contract that a person who looked like a mediator was holding.

“Oh? What do you mean?”

“I want to ask you something.”

At Sasuke’s words, Oyashiro snorted with a *humph*, and silently sat in a chair nearby. Then “Please, go on.” he incited him to continue.

“Do you know the Lightning Group?”

Oyashiro faintly widened his eyes behind his sunglasses.

“I know them. Because they often went after my life.”

“Went after your life?”

“Right. Because they bore a grudge against me.”

He had been told that the Lightning Group brought down vicious people, ripped off their money, and distributed it to poor people, but if it was so Oyashiro was the one to blame for that.

“There’s the possibility that its head kidnaps shinobi, puts them under a genjutsu, and makes them attack the shinobi villages. There have been also some casualties.”

“Really... he reached the point of behaving very outrageously, that Fuushin.”

“Fuushin?”

“It’s his name.”

Apparently it was the name of the head of the Lightning Group.

“Originally he was an outsider child though. Winning here, he became part of my group of guards. His birthplace must have been the Land of Water. Although, unlike the Village of the Hidden Mist that is in the mainland, he was from a small island in the outskirts. It seems that since he was feared by the people of the village, at a young age they got rid of him.”

“They got read of him...?”

To Sasuke, who frowned, “For the kekkei genkai, right?” Oyashiro said.

“Things like unique powers bring nothing but fear from the point of view of weak people. Wrongly suspecting him just because he was different, they despised and discriminated him, and in the end they tried to eliminate him. It seems like he was miserable since he was born.”

Oyashiro’s eyes moved to Sasuke as if he was setting a price on him.

“But I like them you know, the kekkei genkai. You know, they’re good because they have a strong, rare feeling, haven’t they? That’s why I accepted him in my group of guards, since I was gathering various people. To increase his level of rarity, I also got to the point of slaughtering all of them but one.”

He was completely like a child that talks about his toys.

“There were many rebellious child, the birthplace accounts for it. If I couldn’t have used medical ninjutsu, probably I couldn’t have raised them. Fuushin was a relatively good and obedient child, but one day all of a sudden he ended up running away, leading the other children. Why he ended up running away I wonder. Every day I fed him, I even gave him an allowance. Well, when he managed to escape, having lost all my joy, since that I stopped completely being a kekkei genkai collector. It’s difficult to handle it. The kekkei genkai I mean.”

Despite he was supposed to pursue the perpetrators of the attack, he was starting to get confused on who was the villain in this situation.

“...worthless man.”

At the nauseated words he said instinctively, Oyashiro narrowed his eyes behind his sunglasses.

“However, also Orochimaru-san, who’s cooperating with you, came in possession of rare people here. Didn’t you help these people?”

Come to think of it, Orochimaru had come in possession of rare experiment subjects from here and there. It wasn’t strange that he also used this sort of place.

That time in the past, when he had once killed Orochimaru, he had freed the people that had been taken captive by Orochimaru, but probably there had been also many people that had fallen victim of him before that.

“As for me, I’m only supposing. On the point of view of the victims, also the disinterested people are the same as the wrongdoers. The people that didn’t help me are put all together with them.”

“...”

“Then you, even now, go away without stopping this hobby of ours that we practice here. How aren’t you an accomplice? Look who’s talking.”

At Oyashiro’s words, Sasuke sank into silence.

In the middle of the battle, Futsu was fearing the gaze of someone, but probably he was afraid of Oyashiro.

He thought about it for a short while, and then he made up his mind.

“...That Futsu of yours, how he is?”

“He’s fine, his life is not in danger.”

“If it’s so, let him fight once more. In the victory of this time, I used your information. If I win again, next time I’ll free Futsu from your hands.”

Oyashiro, who was profoundly seating on the chair, muttered “Really” bending forward.

“And then, also those guys that are in the seats. I accept the challenge of them all. If you want the Uchiha’s eyes, you should take me on.”

While saying it, Sasuke left the room.

“Oh my, you’re all worked up about it.” Orochimaru said, who had followed after Sasuke, to mock him.

“Shut up.”

“Do you really have the intention of fighting?”

Sasuke halted, and turned his head towards Orochimaru.

“...I’ll free them all.”

The discomfort he had felt in the seats. That was caused by the millionaires gathered that viewed the shinobi as simply tools without being people. Probably this environment was also giving birth to tragedies.

“I’ll end it immediately.”

If it was so, he would break it off.

The efficacy of the bait, that is the Sharingan, had been immense.

Rich people rushed to try to get their hands on it with any means, and there hadn’t been time to rest. However, in short time overall he managed to settle the matches.

“What will you do about this number of people?” Orochimaru said while looking at the seal of the contracts. He had no intention of forcing the people who adored their master, but most of the shinobi desired their liberation.

“...Yamato must be somewhere. Relying on that guy, I’ll ask Konoha to take custody of them.”

Yamato, who had the duty of keeping watch of Orochimaru, probably must have been concealed in this island, too.

“Surely he’ll be greatly perplexed that it turned out to be a big trouble.” Orochimaru laughed.

Sasuke, to discuss with Yamato, parted from Orochimaru for a moment.

“It was amazing. In the end I couldn’t even see the Sharingan...”

Oyashiro appeared behind him.

“...”

“A-ha, are you ignoring me! Is it ok, let’s talk for a little while. Thanks to you I’ve seen amusing things, and now, I feel like I want to chat. ...perhaps about Fuushin.”

While feeling discomfort for his modus operandi that smelled fishy, Sasuke turned towards Oyashiro.

“Apparently, after Fuushin escaped from my residence, all the inhabitants of the island in which he lived were killed. After that, thinking that it was an ominous island, there weren’t people who even got near it. Soon the island became desolate, and gradually it vanished from people’s memory...”

Oyashiro grinned.

“It was exactly where the Kirigakure’s ship that disappeared was going towards, wasn’t it?”

Sasuke startled.

“...you, how far do you know?”

“It’s only a daydream, a wild story. If you follow the story I dreamed of, I’ll teach you the position of this island.”

Oyashiro called an attendant, and began to write the map in a scroll.

“...does it mean that it’s convenient if I’ll get rid of him for you?”

“That’s because Fuushin is killing all his owners he had before me. Well, but still he, becoming a chivalrous thief, apparently wanted to have to do with people.”

Oyashiro handed the closed scroll over to Sasuke.

“As for me, there was a time once when I thought of collecting the Uchiha for real. It has been an honour to meet you.”

Sasuke took the scroll as if to snatch it and “If I resolve this settlement, you’re the next.” he said.

Without changing his facial expression, Oyashiro held his sunglasses and said “Sasuke-kun, you’d better take care of your eyes.”

Probably he was talking about the Sharingan. Without replying to that, Sasuke turned back.

III

He entrusted the shinobi he had rescued to Yamato, and although he had stiffened “Leave it to me.” he answered.

“Because I don’t think it’s just somebody else’s problem, too.”

At these words muttered nonchalantly, he felt like he caught a glimpse of his unique genetic make-up and unfortunate fate.

If he formed bonds, he understood his opponents, and the world inside himself spread out just a little. Doing so, he actually felt the bonds, and he instinctively remembered Naruto’s figure.

He was a shinobi that grew up thanks to a lot of people. He wondered how much in the world Naruto’s ‘world’ would spread. What kind of scenery spread out in the future that Naruto aimed at.

Sasuke thought about himself. About what scenery in the world he wanted to see.

It was hard to see through the future with these eyes that used to stare at nothing but darkness.

Above all in this way, when he was travelling around world, nothing but the darkness of people caught his eyes.

And yet, it had been also impossible for him to stop it.

Sasuke parted with Orochimaru, and went towards the forgotten island alone.

He couldn’t tell exactly for whom, for what. But he had a feeling that had taken root from inside his chest that he had to solve this thing, no matter what.

“...there...”

Checking Oyashiro’s map, Sasuke focused his gaze, and a small island that rose on the surface of the sea appeared.

There was a mountain in the middle of the island, and a wood enclosed its perimeter.

Along the coast some rotten houses were lined up, and there was no sign of people.

“...!”

However, Sasuke’s eyes perceived it. The ship moored at the island’s harbour. Probably a hundred of people could be carried in that. Sasuke observed this ship with his Sharingan.

Thereupon, he spotted the symbol of Kirigakure carved on the ship.

“Is that the ship that disappeared...”

Sasuke observed the island again with this eye.

“...there is.”

On the other side of the town, inside the wood, there were sign of human presence.

Sasuke moulded his chakra and got off the boat, and stood above the waves. As he deleted his presence, he quietly approached the island.

“...”

First of all, Kirigakure’s ship. Sasuke kicked the waves, and got onto the deck of the ship. There was no evidence that it had been devastated. Not even a drop of blood had fallen.

Sasuke jumped off the ship, and landed on the harbour. Besides Kirigakure's, some small boats were connected to the harbour. However, unlike Kirigakure's ship, they were mostly small boats.

“...Kiri's ship stands out. Did they make it moor here, and then move with the small boats...?”

Sasuke passed through the harbour, and walked into the dreary village. The houses were as if they had gone through a storm, all the roofs had been blown away, the windows and the doors had been crushed.

He went through the village, and there the wood spread out. In this wood his skin became sticky for the hot and humid temperature.

His movements were difficult in this place where the trees twisted and huge flowers grew thickly. However, there was human presence in front of him. Sasuke brushed the ivy away, and stared in front of him.

“...!”

Thereupon, in front of where he was going, in the middle of the wood there was someone lying down. There wasn't just one person, there were several people. Immediately near them, there were two people that looked like watch-keepers.

“...”

His eye had already the Sharingan. Sasuke took a small breath, and started running aiming at them.

“...! Who's there!”

The watch-keepers tried to catch sight of Sasuke. However, it was a favourable expedient instead. Sasuke put his opponent under a genjutsu with the Sharingan.

He leapt over the body of the man that was easily defeated, and closed the distance with the man in the back that was forming a hand-seal.

“Noo!”

The man raised his fist over his head. He had to be able not to enter in contact with him. He judged for an instant, trod on an emerging root, and jumped in the exact opposite direction he was heading to.

The man's fist punched the air, and without stopping he hit the ground.

“...!”

A loud sound of an explosion echoed with a *doon*, and the earth hollowed out. It resembled the Explosion Release used by Deidara of the 'Akatsuki', with whom he had fought in the past.

“...if it's so...”

Sasuke fetched a kunai, poured chakra onto it and rushed towards the enemy.

“Damn, Lightning Release!”

The kunai stabbed the man's arm, and the chakra that managed to enshroud the fist disappeared as if it was released. The man tried to pull out the kunai, but Sasuke had closed the distance in front of him, and did a roundhouse kick to the man's head.

“Gaha”

The man's body fell on the ground. Sasuke looked down on the man and seized him with the Sharingan. With this, both the watch-keepers couldn't move.

Sasuke rushed over where the shinobi were lying down. At first sight those men were dressed in Kiri and Kumo shinobi outfits. They were breathing but they were fast asleep without even a moving a muscle.

According to Kakashi's letter, the men who had attacked Konoha had a strange chakra circulating inside them. Sasuke checked inside them with the Sharingan.

"There isn't...no"

Apparently he hadn't found the strange chakra as Kakashi had written to him. Sasuke tried a counter genjutsu on a shinobi from Kirigakure that was near him.

"Nh...yes"

Thereupon, the shinobi from Kirigakure came back to his senses.

"W-where..."

"Can you do a counter genjutsu?" Sasuke asked the man, who was blankly holding his forehead.

"A counter genjutsu?"

"You guys were taken captive and put under a genjutsu."

"Ah, aah... that's so. I was serving as watchkeeper on the deck of the ship... then a small boat approached us..." the man said in order to remember that time.

"I'll hear later. Now our first priority is go away from here." the man was told by Sasuke, and he gave an extensive look around. Seeing his comrades lying down near him, it seemed that little by little he grasped the situation.

"A-a counter genjutsu, I know how to do it."

And it was then that he tried to perform a counter genjutsu on his comrades.

"Argh!"

Suddenly, the Kiri shinobi shouted, a small chakra blade pierced his body, and it made blood splatter around.

"O-ouch...!"

The shinobi from Kirigakure held his left arms, and collapsed on top of his comrade. Someone threw a chakra blade from behind him. He felt a light wind coming from this chakra blade. Sasuke remembered that.

"...I never thought that I'd meet you again here."

The man here was the one who had met in the Bamboo Village, Nowaki.

Behind him there was also Chino, who made a complex-looking expression.

" 'Don't tell me it was you two'... right?"

"...you are Fuushin, who once was the leader of the Lightning Group, and now makes the people under a genjutsu attack the shinobi villages."

"..."

Hearing Sasuke's words, Nowaki retrieved another chakra blade from his pouch. Sasuke promptly stood on alert, but he slashed his own wrist with the edge of the blade. Nowaki, not caring about the blood splattering around, cut also the other wrist.

"...!"

Thereupon, his body began deforming with a burbling sound. His body, which was muscular, became thin, his stature somehow shrunk, and his figure became that of a slender young man about Sasuke's height.

Sasuke looked through the blood that had spilled. In that blood, there was the presence of a strange chakra. He had poured a special chakra inside his blood, maybe it was that that made his body deform.

He wondered if, with the use of this jutsu, he made the exploding people detonate with external wounds as triggers.

“When I met you by chance at the Bamboo Village I thought it would become a troublesome thing. And yet the good thing is that I was able to kill Karyuu that had the possibility of being related to me...” Nowaki made his neck crack.

“I’ll make you confess everything.”

“...can you?”

He had no intention of talking willingly, he understood it when he looked at Nowaki’s expression. Sasuke tried to capture Nowaki with his Sharingan.

In turn Nowaki put both his hands together and formed a hand seal. Wind fluttered around Nowaki with a *whoosh*, and the tree leaves and a cloud of dust concealed his body.

“Wind Release, or...? No.”

Nowaki must have had a kekkei genkai, too. Moreover, it seemed that that strong wind that showed no sign of slowing down had begun exceeding the level of a Wind Release. Nowaki was still forming seals in the middle of the wind. The range of the wind was growing wide and strong.

Then Nowaki, who had finished with the seals, yelled: “Typhoon Release: Sequence of Blasts of Strong Wind!!”

“...Damn!”

Whoosh, the wind howled. The bodies of the shinobi, abducted by the strength of the wind, were pulled along, the trees nearby bent, and also Sasuke’s body almost lifted. It was exactly a typhoon.

“Well...”

Nowaki unfolded his haori. Inside it, chakra blades about the size of the palm of a hand were stocked closely. Nowaki fetched them, put chakra into them and threw them casually.

The chakra blades joined the wind, and swooped down on Sasuke.

“Tch...”

Sasuke jumped clicking his tongue. Thereupon, his body was swept away and thrown up in the air by the wind.

“!”

Amidst the wind there weren’t only chakra blades, there were also trees that had been mowed down. Even a large tree had become a weapon that attacked Sasuke.

However, Sasuke used that as foothold, and while avoiding the chakra blades that were flying about he managed to land.

Even so, such was the strength of the wind that he couldn’t approach Nowaki.

Nowaki’s wind was about to wrap the whole island. His strength was incomparable to Karyuu’s of the Dark Thunder Group, or Futsu’s, who met at the Colosseum.

Come to think of it, the head of the Lightning Group had also set free his comrades from Kirigakure’s elites.

Nowaki formed complex hand seals again, and then he released it.

“The finishing blow... Great Sequence of Blasts of Extreme Wind!!”

Along with Nowaki’s voice, the revolving wind began spinning in the opposite way. The wind, which was moving slowly to accumulate an enormous energy, sped up immediately.

“This is...”

The wind made an eerie noise with a *whoosh*, turned into a huge sword and went near Sasuke. The sword, just like a sickle mowing the ears of rice, chopped down the huge trees of the wood.

—Susanoo!

His mangekyō Sharingan invoked it. A huge warrior in armour with wings appeared to wrap Sasuke's body.

“Damn...!”

Sasuke stopped the huge sword with Susanoo's sword. The sound of the sword of wind and his sword clashing echoed, and sweat beaded both their foreheads.

“...Uooooo!”

Sasuke charged his word with his eye. Susanoo firmly pushed one leg in front of the other, and began pushing the sword of wind putting all its weight on it. Susanoo's sword steadily eroded the sword of wind.

“...damn...”

Nowaki chewed his lips thoroughly, and separated his hands that were forming a seal. Thereupon, the sword of wind disappeared, turning into wind again.

“I won't let you finish it...!”

However Nowaki formed a seal again immediately. The rotation of the wind returned and again a violent storm wrapped up around him. Even the Susanoo was pushed by the wind from behind, and staggered for several steps. It won't stop until he defeated Nowaki himself.

Sasuke turned his eyes towards the place where Nowaki probably was.

“...”

Thereupon, he perceived that Nowaki almost hadn't moved from where he was not long ago. The core of the wind, the eye of the typhoon. If he aimed at it, he would be there.

Sasuke sneaked away from the Susanoo not to be noticed by Nowaki. Then he left as he maintained the Susanoo, and *chew*, he bit his thumb, and applied his right hand with the blood seeping out to the ground.

—Kuchiyose no Jutsu!

A big snake appeared with a *don*, Aoda. He was a snake loyal to Sasuke.

“Sasuke-sama, what do you wish?”

“Stretch!”

“Understood.”

He ordered from Aoda's head, and as he was told by Sasuke Aoda pushed his head towards the sky. His huge body broke through Nowaki's wind, and he took Sasuke along under the blue sky.

“Well done!”

Sasuke jumped high from there. In the core of the wind. In the eye of the typhoon. He rushed inside it, and clad his hand with Chidori, a lightning attack.

“...!?”

Nowaki, who noticed the Chidori's chirping sound, raised his eyes up in the sky in astonishment, and tried to fire his wind towards Sasuke. But it was too late.

“Uoooooooooo!”

He stroke Nowaki with Chidori, which emitted the radiance of lightning, and with the energy of his fall.

“Guaaaaaaa!”

The lightning attack pierced through him, and Nowaki's body was thrown into the ground. The hand seal he was forming untied, and the wind that was making a thunderous noise disappeared right away. Then, only the blue sky was left.

“Ha...haa...”

For the effect of using the power of his eye, Sasuke was panting fast. However, he had captured Nowaki, who was the ringleader, and he had to pull out information.

“...damn it.”

Nowaki tried to get up to escape from Sasuke's eyes, but he crumbled down without strength.

Sasuke was standing up immediately near Nowaki and caught his eyes with the Sharingan. Thereupon, in that instant a great amount of information began appearing. Also his personal life began flowing like a revolving lantern.

Nowaki had always been alone.

He was blamed for the raging storms that came to the island, he was palmed off to a rich guy that was interested in Nowaki's power, he was tortured into submission by the rich guy, scraping off his willpower of disobeying, he was recruited for fights he didn't wish for, and he was forced to fight risking his life just for his owner's amusement.

Nowaki's power was strong, and people kept him at a distance because they were afraid of this power, he was alienated by those around him and he became hard hearted.

He had never been defeated. Only that was his secret pride.

Then Nowaki had collapsed in the middle of that Colosseum with his arms and leg outstretched.

‘Was I... defeated...’

The family that owned Nowaki was yelling abusing words towards him, who was in a blank amazement. However, they didn't enter in Nowaki's ears.

‘That's true, you've been defeated.’

Then a voice fell on Nowaki. A hand extended towards him was reflected in Nowaki's eyes. His eyes slowly moved from the palm of that hand to a face. That one here was—Red.

“...!”

His field of vision turned red all of a sudden. He was dragged into that absolutely red world.

“A genjutsu!”

Sasuke put his strength in his eye, and repelled it by main force.

“...as I expected, the Uchiha's Sharingan is disgusting.”

He left Nowaki's consciousness, and came back to reality. Thereupon there was Chino, who was carrying Nowaki in her shoulders.

Her eyes were dyed with red.

“These eyes...”

At Sasuke's words, Chino's expression became stern.

“Violence goes by the name of oblivion. Even though it was the Uchiha clan who drove us, the Chinoike clan, to the depths of despair...”

“What are you talking about...?”

Chino's eyes seized Sasuke severely. Thereupon, the earth at his feet turned into a red sea, and Sasuke's body started sinking.

“Damn...!”

Chino looked down on Sasuke from above the red waving sea.

“Sasuke-chan. Nowaki is not the ringleader. *I* am. *I* turned the shinobi into exploding people, and sent them out to the villages.”

“Why such behaviour...” Sasuke asked. Chino tilted her neck calmly.

“Sasuke-chan, you don’t listen to other people talking, and you didn’t answer the question. And now, even if you demand it...”

Chino closed her eyes, laughing with her nose. Thereupon, bloody tears flowed quickly from her eyes.

The drops of blood fell into the sea.

“...!”

Prompted by Chino’s tears, suddenly the sea created huge waves. They swooped down on Sasuke.

“...”

He was dragged in the midst of the waves, heaven and earth could mix together in a huge mess to the point that he didn’t even know which one was which. He couldn’t breath.

“...damn it!”

Sasuke put his strength in his eyes again.

“...haa...!”

Finally he sneaked away from the genjutsu, and took a big breath.

While sending oxygen to his lungs he raised his head, and Chino’s figure was not there anymore.

Sasuke Shinden

Chapter 4: Red eyes looking towards the future

I

Chino's genjutsu had appeared all of a sudden. When he realised it, both Nowaki and his comrade had disappeared. The wood had been mowed down by Nowaki's Typhoon Release, and the island was wretched.

“...Oi, are you all right?”

However, among these things he was able to detect some shinobi that had been taken prisoner by Chino and the others.

He woke them up using a counter genjutsu, and soon they came back to their senses. Since they had been tossed around by Nowaki's wind, everyone was somehow injured, but they were alive. They thanked Sasuke profusely. The Kumo shinobi were evasive though.

In the past Sasuke had attacked Killer Bee of the Hachibi, Raikage's brother, and tried to kidnap him. Later on he had also fought with the Raikage, and snatched away one of the Raikage's arms. They adored the Raikage, the leader of their village. It was inevitable that they were having mixed feelings.

For the time being, Sasuke decided to send them back to each one's land.

First of all Kirigakure. Then, Kumogakure.

Then, when he arrived at the harbour of the Land of Lightning, in which Kumogakure was located, a trifling thing happened.

“Uooooo, were you all right, you guyyyyyys!!”

“...Raikage?”

“Raikage-sama!”

“Raikage-sama came here to greet us!”

While destroying the buildings, the Raikage came rushing towards the harbour. Hearing the report of the rescued shinobi, it was evident that he couldn't contain himself.

Near the Raikage, there were Darui and C, his close aides.

The Raikage, who had a muscular body, arrived at the harbour like the speed of lightning and clapped the shinobi's shoulders as a reward saying “I'm glad you're safe!”.

His strength was such that he wondered if their bones wouldn't broke, but the Raikage thanked them personally, and as if the thread of nervousness had broke apart, tears rose in the eyes of the Kumogakure shinobi.

Sasuke, while giving a sidelong glance to such scene, quietly tried to leave the place.

“Brat!”

However, he was stopped by the Raikage's call. Unable to ignore it, he turned back, and the Raikage stared intently at him with a hard face. Sasuke looked at his figure. It was concealed by a haori, but his left arm wasn't there. Sasuke's past conduct had cast a shadow even on the Raikage's future.

“...”

The Raikage said nothing. Seeing that, Darui opened his mouth.

“...sorry. You saved us.”

Probably even Darui had mixed feelings towards Sasuke. Even so, he expressed his feelings of gratitude on behalf of the shinobi of Kumogakure. At Darui's words, C continued.

“As for the shinobi that were under a genjutsu and attacked the village, I heard that a Konoha medical nin has found a cure, and they could save them all. However, since a high skill is needed for this cure, that Konoha medical nin is coming here now.”

In Konoha, Tsunade was famous for her medical ninjutsu, but if they considered her resourcefulness Sakura was probably the one. Sasuke thought that she was the shinobi they needed.

It was impossible for him to stop though.

Sasuke had to look for Chino, and he set forth again. He had to stop that strange jutsu she used.

“Where do you intend on going!” the Raikage asked Sasuke.

“...I’m going looking for the ringleader.”

“If it’s so, also Kumogakure will cooperate. That criminal attacked the village with cruel means! We need to capture them as soon as possible!”

The Raikage was all worked up. Sasuke shook his head.

“...no. No one but I can do it.”

“What did you say!”

At Sasuke’s words, suddenly the atmosphere became tense. Even if he felt the Raikage’s wrath, Sasuke continued.

“The enemy has an unique ocular technique. She excels at genjutsu, and yet the number of her abilities is still unknown. If we consider that the shinobi that had been kidnapped in the recent affair of the missing people were at their wit’s end, if we get near her carelessly we’ll probably only produce more victims.”

While listening to his story, the Raikage’s mouth turned down at the corners.

“She was able to catch me in a genjutsu as well, but with my eye power I managed to release the jutsu. Nothing but my eyes will oppose to those red eyes.”

Red eyes. He said that word unintentionally. But at that, the Raikage opened his mouth in surprise.

“...red eyes?”

“...yeah. The enemy has blood-red eyes.”

The Raikage shifted his gaze, pondering, then he looked at Sasuke again.

“Don’t tell me she’s from the Chinoike clan of the ‘Kerryūgan’.”

“You know them?”

Chino had claimed to be from the Chinoike clan. Seeing Sasuke’s reaction, the Raikage asked him in turn “You don’t know them?”. He couldn’t understand where he was getting at.

“...hmm. It can’t be helped, let’s explain him this much.”

Apparently this was a story from even before the time when Senju Hashirama and Uchiha Madara sharpened their swords.

The Chinoike clan. It was said that they, who lived in the Land of Lightning, had eyes that got wet with red blood, called Kerryūgan, and were able to handle various jutsu by using blood.

Apparently they excelled particularly at genjutsu, and the moment you were caught in their pupils you weren’t able to escape.

Back then, it had been arranged that a girl from the Chinoike clan would marry as the concubine of the daimyō of the Land of Lightning. The girl had a good disposition and she was lovely, but the legal wife was jealous of her.

Accidentally, shortly after the girl became his concubine the daimyō fell ill, and died.
‘That woman he married is to blame!’

Thereupon, the legal wife apparently laid all the blame on her. She said that the Chinoike clan had deceived the daimyō, and at the end they killed him.

But she had made it up, they were all lies without exception. However, the people around her that knew the unique genetic make-up of the Chinoike clan decided to swallow the legal wife’s words.

As a result, the girl was exiled to a place called Valley of Hell along with the Chinoike clan.

“That time, the daimyō’s legal wife hired the Uchiha clan to chase the Chinoike clan away.”

“...what did you say...”

“Even in those days the Uchiha’s name was well known far and wide. Above all, the Uchiha clan, who possessed the Sharingan, was the only one who could oppose to the Chinoike clan, who had that unique ocular technique. I heard that the Chinoike clan wanted an occasion to discuss with the Uchiha clan but they didn’t listen to them.”

Also the Uchiha clan, who would continue suffering for being persecuted by Konoha, had supported the persecution of someone. It was just like a war, so to speak. They incidentally had driven someone into a corner, and unjustly crushed them under their feet. Thereupon, Itachi’s figure was brought back to his mind.

Probably, in Itachi not only the Uchiha’s achievements, but also the darkness that lied dormant in the Uchiha appeared. That’s why, without blaming anyone, taking the blow all by himself, maybe he tried to die carrying this darkness so that hate wouldn’t disseminate.

The people involved in the recent affair, all of them, were burdened with the irrationality of the world that hadn’t been able to do anything with its own strength, and tended towards darkness.

A crime was a crime for sure. However, he wondered if this story would end with that if he killed them.

“...brat.”

Thereupon, the Raikage opened his mouth.

“Once, Naruto bowed his head placing both hands on the ground in the snow for your sake.”

At those unexpected words Sasuke opened his eyes wide.

“It was when you kidnapped my younger brother Bee, and Danzō had authorised us to get rid of you as a missing nin at our request. Naruto wanted us to stop coming after you, because you were his friend, and he said that he couldn’t just watch silently.”

“...”

“He knows you, he knows your character, and he never goes back to his word. You, feel the meaning of being able to walk freely in this world now. Then find also a reason that makes you understand those around you.”

Those were straightforward words.

In the past, Sasuke tried to execute the Five Kage and to unify all the villages by himself. He thought that was right.

However, while he was also somehow violent, the Raikage was adored by the shinobi of his village, and when Sasuke saw the Raikage giving advice even to him in that way, he

thought that if that time he had executed the Five Kage, he would have let hatred dwell in a lot of people, and maybe he would have cast a further shadow.

“The Chinoike clan, who had been exiled to the Valley of Hell, erased their presence from the world of the shinobi, and were thought to be all annihilated. However, if you say that a person who has the Kairyūgan appeared now, maybe secretly there is a survivor. The Valley of Hell is in the Land of Hot Water. That place must be known only to the Uchiha clan and the shinobi from Yugakure.”

The Land of Hot Water. That was the place in which Sasuke had met Chino and the others by chance. Moreover, the Land of Fire of the Village Hidden in the Leaves, the Land of Water of the Village Hidden in the Mist, the Land of Lightning of the Village Hidden in the Clouds: the Land of Hot Water was in a geographic situation relatively close to each one of the villages.

Chino was in the Valley of Hell.

For some reason he had this presentiment.

However, even if he was Sasuke of the Uchiha clan, who had exiled the Chinoike clan, he didn't know where the Valley of Hell was located.

“I'll serve as a mediator for you with Yugakure. As for the rest, you, bring out the result.” The Raikage snorted with a *umph*, and went back to the shinobi of his village.

Sasuke slightly bowed his head towards his back.

Then, fixing his eyes on Yugakure's direction, he kicked the ground.

II

He ran incessantly for few days, and finally arrived at the Village Hidden in the Hot Springs, where the steam of the hot springs was rising up from here and there.

Near the steam, hot springs lodges were lined in a row and crowded with tourists.

Probably they were able to sojourn peacefully because the shinobi of the village were assigned to the maintenance of public order. He caught sight of people who looked like the VIPs of the country as well.

“Sasuke-san from Konoha. Please let me be your guide to the Valley of Hell.”

Apparently the communication from the Raikage had already arrived, because when he visited Yugakure's central organization a shinobi had appeared as his guide.

“However, you arrived so soon... It will take us at least one day to go to the Valley of Hell from here. Shall we go after you rest for a while?”

“No, I want to leave immediately.”

There was no spare time to rest. Receiving Sasuke's words, the man nodded

“Understood”. He had the intention of going alone if only he had taught him the place, but since apparently the Valley of Hell was a hard-to-reach place, one couldn't know where it was unless he was a person whose hometown was Yugakure.

“Originally, the Valley of Hell was a plot of land that had to be avoided.” the man explained while advancing into the wood. “Originally, the place was called like that so that of course the strangers, but also the people of the village wouldn't go near it. When the catastrophe of the Chinoike happened...”

“The catastrophe of the Chinoike?”

“Right” the man nodded. “The Chinoike clan, who had been exiled in the Valley of Hell by the Uchiha clan, must have had no other way except dying rotting. Anyhow, the Valley of Hell is a rocky area where the vegetation doesn't grow, pregnant with volcanic

gas, it's a place not apt for humans to live in. Even so, several months after the Chinoike clan was exiled in the Valley of Hell, a person who had went to check on the situation saw it."

"...what?"

"A sea of blood spread out in the rocky area that was once empty, and the figure of the Chinoike clan sipping it."

Sasuke remembered Chino's genjutsu. It was the red sea he had been dragged into.

"He had been put under a genjutsu?"

"No, I don't know the things in detail. However, since that the village treated the Valley of Hell as a plot of land that had to be avoided, and prohibited people from getting near it. Then, the shinobi from Yugakure forgot about the existence of the Valley of Hell. They forgot even where the Valley of Hell was."

If it was so, he wondered why he knew the way that led to the Valley of Hell.

When Sasuke expressed a question mark in his face for the inconsistency of the story, the man lowered his eyes.

"Recently, there had been a man who came across the Valley of Hell again. His name was Hidan. Later on he became a member of 'Akatsuki', and he was the only one who spread the horrors of war into the ninja world."

He never imagined that the story of 'Akatsuki' would come out here. It was the organization that Itachi, his brother, belonged to and also Sasuke for a while had entrusted himself with.

However, during the period in which Sasuke was in it 'Akatsuki' was already lacking a lot of members, and Hidan wasn't there.

"Hidan wasn't the kind of man that did as he was told, and when he was still a child he discovered the Valley of Hell, which he had heard of from rumours, out of curiosity. Since he disliked the stench of sulphur of the Valley of Hell, apparently Hidan didn't go as far as its depths, but he said that there were corpses scattered around here and there. They hadn't survived in the Valley of Hell and had perished, or so we thought, but he said that there were intact bodies without skeletons, and the blood hadn't got dry. The shinobi of the village went to check and, as Hidan had said, there were corpses after practically no time that they were killed."

If it was so, the Chinoike clan probably lived in the Valley of Hell until recently.

"There had been also people who suspected that Hidan had killed them, but it seemed that they had killed each other inside the clan. We don't know what happened, but we were demanded again not to go near the Valley of Hell as a plot of land that had to be avoided."

Then, the man shut his mouth for a moment. His eyes wandered about as if he was worried, and in the end he spoke as if the words had been wrung out of him.

"No... maybe for fear of being dragged into a trouble, we only pretended a feigned ignorance. In Yugakure there are a lot of resources, and we are not short of means of subsistence. We wanted to reject those things that would have made our peaceful livelihood ripple, and such feeling was inside us."

"..."

"Yugakure, as the 'safe hot spring health resort', has also connections with the daimyō and high executives of various countries from ancient times. Just like we had a connection with the daimyō of the Land of Lightning also for being entrusted with the

Chinoike. We even escaped from the horrors of war with our backroom deals. Then, burying our heads on the sand we maintained our peace..."

The man made a sorrowful expression.

"We did so even about Hidan. Usually, the common practice with missing nin is getting rid of them. However, in Yugakure there weren't shinobi who could match Hidan. The village pretended to leave him alone. For this reason, there had been also people who died."

Maybe a peaceful world was making their feelings as shinobi become dull. Then, from now on, the world would probably advance in this direction.

However, dissidents always appear without warning. When it happens, there must be somebody to oppose them.

Maybe also the reason for letting Orochimaru and Kabuto live was there. However, apart from that, there was also the need of shinobi prepared for crisis that could happen someday, and who polished their fangs for peace.

All these things occurred to him.

Sasuke wondered if he shouldn't aim at that.

"It's there."

As the guide had said, in a full day or so they arrived at the Valley of Hell. The smokes, whose size he couldn't help but compare to the ones he had seen in the Village Hidden in the Hot Springs, were blowing out with a rumbling sound.

"From here on I'll go alone."

At Sasuke's words, the man said "Be careful." and left.

Alone, Sasuke took a step into the Valley of Hell.

"..."

On both sides of the valley there were mountains of bare rock. This bare rock had changed its colour in dark-reddish brown. There was no trace of vegetation.

A stinking smoke filled the valley, and there were geysers that spurted out boiling water.

This was a place in which one should make an effort just for being there. If someone were to be exiled in such place, normally he shouldn't survive.

However, as the man from Yugakure had said, the Chinoike clan had been living here until recently.

Probably they went through so much pain.

—Konoha is huge, so the necessities of life are probably granted, but here many unreasonable things are ok.

The words Chino had said came back to Sasuke's mind.

The Valley of Hell was wider than he had imagined, but Sasuke advanced inside it as if he had been shown the way.

"...!"

Thereupon, suddenly he spotted a deep red pond before his eyes. It was completely like blood. That instant, he stood on guard as if waiting for a genjutsu, but there was no sign of chakra.

Sasuke got near that pond.

"This is..."

Apparently, a red hot mud had spurted out from the earth. It gathered at the bottom of the pond, and it made it look red.

Apparently there were red ponds here and there in front of where he was heading. While thinking 'The thing that the shinobi Yugakure had seen back then were probably these red ponds', he took an extensive view of the ponds.

"...!"

Thereupon, a human shape appeared in one of the ponds. Sasuke immediately ran towards that direction.

"This is..."

He couldn't believe the scene in front of his own eyes. Inside the red pond, the shinobi that had probably been kidnapped were lying all over crowded closely.

At the bottom of this pond there was red mud, and the bodies of the shinobi were half buried in this mud. As for the temperature of the pond, he felt it was less hot if compared to the others, but the bodies of the shinobi inside the pond had become red.

Then he felt the presence of chakra coming from this pond. Sasuke reflected the figure of this pond and the shinobi with his Sharingan.

"...this is..."

There was chakra crawling exactly like a worm inside the pond.

In the bodies of the shinobi there were cuts here and there, and it seemed that this chakra was entering inside the bodies from the opening of the wounds.

Once entered inside the body, the chakra crept around within the bodies as if it followed the flow of the blood.

"..."

The shinobi in whose bodies that strange chakra had begun circulating all over had scabs on the opening of the wounds to close them completely, and the wounds disappeared with a *suu-*.

It seemed that after they had been brought here, the kidnapped shinobi had been turned into explosive people in this pond, and then sent to all the villages.

Sasuke tried a counter genjutsu on a shinobi that was right near him. However, the moment Sasuke put his hand into the pond, the chakra that was crawling like a worm begun swarming on Sasuke's hand. A stinging pain ran though his skin.

"Tch..."

Apparently this chakra had opened a wound, and was trying to penetrate inside him. He started to pull his hand out of the pond to wipe the chakra away, and looked again at the shinobi that were lying in the pond with their eyes closed.

He couldn't sense any intent in them. They had lost their human feelings, they were just Chino's soldiers.

They absolutely reminded him of White Zetsu.

"..."

Sasuke turned his eyes in front of him.

To rescue the shinobi that were kept prisoner in the pond, and to protect the village as well, he had to defeat Chino.

"...here..."

Finally he arrived at the deepest part of the Valley of Hell. The scenery that spread in front of Sasuke's eyes took involuntarily his breath away.

There, a huge red pond, which was no match for the ones he saw until now, was boiling gently and emitting steam.

That one looked like the red sea he had seen in the genjutsu. He had trouble breathing for its chocking heat.

“...Your tenacity is like a snake’s...”

In the midst of the boiling pond, a voice resounded from a place concealed by the steam. “Well done, Sasuke-chan.”

On the surface of the pond that kept on boiling, Chino was walking towards him with bare feet.

Her eyes were not red yet.

“...why would you do such things?”

He hadn’t got the easygoing disposition of listening to his opponent’s speech, but Sasuke asked it anyway.

Chino had been cheerful as they were in the Bamboo Village, but she obstinately kept her mouth shut.

“...Is it true that the Uchiha clan had exiled your clan in this land?”

When he changed the question, Chino’s eyes narrowed to glare at Sasuke.

“First Nowaki, now me, where do you get your information?”

Chino looked at Sasuke with an irritated look.

“That’s right. Our clan was burdened with false suspicions, and was locked up in this land by the Uchiha clan. Originally, the Kairyūgan of our clan had been compared with the Byakugan, the Sharingan and the Rinnegan, that were called the Three Great Dōjutsu, and apparently they made fun of it.”

‘However’, Chino said.

“We swallowed this hot boiling water, we shoot down the birds that flew in the sky, we survived eating the herbs that barely grew. They say that my clan, worn out by conflicts, barely survived here without exiting in the outside world. Then the world forgot about the Chinoike clan... or it should have had.”

“Should have had?”

Chino turned her eyes away, looking mortified.

“Oyashiro, who came to know about the existence of the Chinoike from books of the past, kidnapped me when I was sill a child, and killed the whole clan.”

—Increasing his level of rarity, there was also the fact that everyone but him alone was completely massacred.

Those were the words Oyashiro told him in the Colosseum. Was he talking about Chino?

“He told me the history of my clan but, in fact, Oyashiro knew it from the old history books he had. I, who was kidnapped, had been instilled with shinobi training at Oyashiro’s mansion from before I became old enough to be aware of it. I was turned into a tool that used weapons on the sites of bloody battles, I also killed without wanting it. That’s why I ran away.”

In that case, he wondered if she had been in the Lightning Group as well. Sasuke thought so, but apparently he was wrong.

“The majority of the group of guards who had run away with us formed the Lightning Group with Nowaki and mobilized with him, but I came back to the Valley of Hell alone. I had the feeling that I would understand who I was if I came here. But it was useless...” Chino made a painful expression.

“My own father, my own mother, the faces of my clan, I couldn’t remember anyone... I didn’t know why I was born, what I was living for. I was empty... empty.”

Saying such things, Chino's expression became inaccessible. Her eyes slowly became red.

“But still, I intended to live quietly here. I wanted to stay away from the disputes. However, after being deceived by Kirigakure, dissolving the Lightning Group and escaping, Nowaki came back to me. More than a year passed before Nowaki's wounds healed. … We have no village to guard. We have no family to protect. We have no one to love. We were used, and we were thrown away, only this is our mere existence, that's all.”

“…”

“We, who are people born to have a kekkei genkai, started being tormented by persecutors who labelled themselves as ‘normal’. We are wrongly suspected just because we are born. Peace, peace they say, but if conflicts were to disappear, people holding a kekkei genkai would be persecuted again… ! That's why I thought of destroying it! I won't be able to have things like hopes in the future of such world!”

Sasuke couldn't deny Chino's words.

Even the Uchiha clan had been exposed to cold eyes in Konoha. That's why Sasuke hated Konoha.

However, there was a part that was definitely different for Sasuke and for Chino. Sasuke was born within relationships, and experienced personally these bonds, and grew up with them.

Chino instead was a person who had nothing from the beginning. She didn't even know the faces of her parents, she hadn't got to know their warmth, she hadn't known bonds. Most likely, she was closer to Naruto.

—You were alone from the beginning!! What do you say you know about me!!! Huh!!!?

—We suffer because we have bonds!!

—What does someone like you know about losing them…!!

These were the words with which in the past he had attacked Naruto, who didn't have bonds, saying that he knew nothing about him who was suffering for having lost his bonds. Even so, Naruto frantically tried to understand Sasuke, and to reach out to Sasuke's heart. He thought back now. He wondered what had been like Naruto's suffering, who had no bonds.

What had been like the fear of having no existence who acknowledges you, no existence who loves you.

And how much great was the solitude when you find an important existence from your empty condition, you form bonds, and then you lose these bonds.

His chest ached.

And yet Naruto hadn't cast Sasuke away until the end.

“…I envied you, Sasuke”

Chino stared at Sasuke motionless.

“You were born in the village of Konoha, you have the name of the Uchiha, you have a family that loves you. After you left the village you made your bad reputation become known, but now you're travelling freely. That's because there are even people who love and protect you.”

“…!”

Her *Kerryūgan* had become red. From her pupils, tears were falling drop by drop.

“I understand. You’re living and keep being always, always, always loved by someone. Without you even noticing it, without you even trying to see them, there are always people like those around you. For me... it’s different.”

Chino said “We’ve talked too much” and paused.

“If you want to stop me, you’ll have to kill me. But this time you won’t forget it, the Kerryūgan of the Chinoike clan!”

Chino fetched a kunai, and quickly sliced both her wrists.

Her blood flowed out. It fell onto the red boiling pond.

“The Chinoike clan handles various techniques using blood... They especially make use of the iron component that circulated into the blood. And this place” Chino’s chakra started crawling inside the red pond “these red ponds, which contain a lot of iron, make the Chinoike’s power even more strong.”

Chino formed a hand seal.

“Kerryūgan: Kerryūshōten!”

“...!”

The chakra that was crawling inside the red ponds gathered at Chino’s feet and rose. Then it turned into the shape of red dragon. The dragon had eight heads. Its size was impressive.

“Eat him!”

The heads of the dragon opened their big mouths, and swooped down on Sasuke.

“Damn...”

It wasn’t an opponent that could cross swords with a living being. Sasuke put his strength in his eyes.

—Susanoo!

A warrior in armour appeared. Sasuke stabbed a head of the dragon that was attacking him with the sword of the Susanoo. He thought that with this power he would get rid of the head, but on the contrary a new head grew right away from the severed part. Then it bit the Susanoo and stopped its movements. The point that had been bitten emitted steam with a sizzling sound. Another head of the dragon coiled around the Susanoo.

Sasuke spread Susanoo’s wings and escaped in the sky.

“I won’t let you get away!”

In order to capture Sasuke, Chino opened her eyes wide. Thereupon, Sasuke’s world became red. It was Chino’s genjutsu.

He used that instant to try to dissolve the genjutsu, and one head of the dragon stretched aiming at the wings of the Susanoo. Sasuke pierced through the wide-open mouth of the dragon with the sword. Susanoo’s sword tore the throat of the blood dragon apart. The head of the blood dragon burst open, and scattered around.

Sasuke made Susanoo land, and aimed at the base of the eight heads with the sword.

“Here!”

The sword was stuck very deeply, and two heads of the dragon fell into a red pond. A huge quantity of water splashed around.

The distance between Susanoo and the blood dragon shortened, Chino and his eyes met and also Sasuke set a genjutsu on Chino.

“Tch...”

However, apparently Chino had set many genjutsu guards inside her own brain, many red walls blocked his way, and hindered Sasuke's penetration. These walls dissolved muddily and became waves, and approached Sasuke.

“...a genjutsu trap...”

The waves came in contact with Sasuke's body, and his memory was slightly exposed to Chino. Chino's genjutsu was clever. Furthermore his head felt dizzy. Maybe the iron component of his body was being tampered with.

If he prolonged this, this would become a disadvantage. It was then that he concentrated on that, on how to defeat her.

“...why...” Chino suddenly yelled towards Sasuke.

“Why are you fighting for Konoha!”

She had come in contact with Sasuke's memories, and maybe she had seen something.

“Konoha's leaves are bright, the roots are dark...! In Konoha there are both light and darkness! To become the nourishment of Konoha, your clan have been absorbed by its roots! Why are you fighting for Konoha nevertheless! Why are you able to stay in Konoha's future without being pessimistic!”

Sasuke closed the distance between him and Chino, and looked at her.

Why was he fighting for Konoha? The answer was quickly found in the rest of his thoughts.

“...Because I'm alive.”

“What does it mean!”

Sasuke remembered. The morning sun he saw with Naruto at the Valley of the End. The day in which he admitted his defeat.

“There's a friend who rescued me. There's a friend who's able to share our mutual pain...”

“...a friend, who's able to share...”

“And my wish that also the world would become like that someday... connects me to Konoha!”

He would endure until that day would come. He would be the person who would see it with his very eyes.

—I'm not alone anymore!!

“I'll break off the chain of hatred that runs rampant in this world! Just like my brother did, I'll support this world from the shadows, and then...”

Sasuke declared it clearly.

“In front of where the world is staring at... light!”

Sasuke opened his eyes wide. This time the mangekyō Sharingan caught Chino.

“Ku, ah...”

The movements of Chino and the blood dragon stopped.

Sasuke aimed at Chino with Susanoo's sword. The match was settled.

“...Chino!!”

Thereupon, Nowaki yelled her name, and jumped in.

—Taiton, Mōfū Daireppa!!

The wind rose all at once, and the wind that had turned into a blade clashed with Susanoo's sword. Although the trajectory of the sword deviated, with the pressure of the sword both their bodies were sent flying, and the blood dragon, which had lost its chakra, crumbled with a *splash*.

“...oow...”

Chino, whose body had been thrown against a rocky wall, got up while holding her body. Nowaki had collapsed right near her, and his wounds were even more serious than Chino's.

“...! Nowaki! Why did you come out...!”

Chino turned pale, and rushed over Nowaki. There Nowaki raised forcibly his body, and protected Chino with his back.

In front of Nowaki's eyes, there was Sasuke.

“...”

Sasuke, looking at the figures of those two, told Chino “The meaning of the words I said before must be clear now...”

At that, Chino opened her eyes wide, and looked at Nowaki astonished.

—There's a friend who rescued me. There's a friend who's able to share our mutual pain...

She wasn't alone. She had a bond in this world, she was alive.

Tears began flowing from Chino's eyes.

Red tears. *Drip, drip*, they fell drop by drop.

“...Nowaki, enough...” Chino said while holding up her sobs “That's enough...”

Chino put a hand on Nowaki's back, and looked up to Sasuke.

“I wish we hadn't meet in the Bamboo Village. In that case, our hate could have been one-sided.”

Unlike her words, her expression was somehow bright.

“After we met and talk, you weren't an opponent I hated in particular...”

He met by chance with people, and formed bonds together by talking and knowing them.

A lot of things changed just exchanging only few words.

“I've lost.”

Chino's tears, that were red, turned into transparent tears.

“If there are guys like you, I'd really like to see what kind of future will come for this world.”

III

Chino was standing before a red pond. At the end of it, Sasuke looked at her.

“...Sasuke, your memories appeared just a little. Maybe the thing that will answer to your doubts is here.”

Chino didn't have a fighting spirit anymore. Probably she intended on accepting any punishment.

But before, she told him she wanted to talk, and he was brought to the pond in which the shinobi were lying.

Chino put her hands inside the pond, and the chakra that was crawling in the pond went back to her. Also the one that was circulating inside the shinobi's bodies was included.

“During the Forth Shinobi World War, some suspicious army corps passed through Yugakure's undergrounds.” Chino said while looking far away to remember.

“I can also acquire information from mineral springs. When this suspicious army corps came in contact with the mineral springs underground, some information flowed into it.” She was probably talking about the White Zetsu.

“I used this jutsu on that structure. However, while using it there was a thing I thought it was strange.”

When Chino placed her hand at the bottom of the pond, the eruption of hot mud stopped, and went back inside the earth. The water of the pond drew back, and the bodies of the shinobi gradually were freed from the water. Chino looked back to Sasuke.

“In that suspicious group, there were guys who thought indistinctly that he had to fight against something very different. No, it’s not that they were thinking... maybe it had been planted into them unilaterally.”

“...what do you mean.”

While he listened to her, his heartbeat increased slightly. He had an unpleasant premonition.

“I don’t understand clearly, but... I have a hunch that those guys had been prepared for something different. For fighting something much more powerful...”

Hearing Chino’s words, Sasuke shut his eyes tightly.

There was a thing that worried him about the battle with Kaguya.

Why Kaguya, in spite of being so strong, had built an army of White Zetsu and was making arrangements for a war?

His needless anxiety was about to become reality.

“This something will definitely come someday.”

“Are you trying to tell me that there are beings that intimidated even Kaguya... and that they’ll arrive to this earth...?”

Was a day going to come when the peace that they finally obtained was going to be broken?

Because of that, will the future world on which people would walk be destroyed again? However, ‘No’ Sasuke shook his head. I won’t let such thing be. I’ll definitely protect it. Looking at Sasuke, Chino said “You shouldn’t take it upon yourself alone.”

When he looked at her, Chino was laughing.

“You have a friend that can share your pain, right?”

At those words he sank into silence for a second, then he nodded quietly.

“...that’s right.”

That’s right, he wasn’t alone.

Epilogue

There were a lot of people coming and going and the Village Hidden in the Leaves had become animated. Chino and the others had been sent to the other side of the village, in a prison. They didn't know what kind of punishment had been decided, but they intended on accepting it entirely.

Then Chino and the others were gathered in a room. There were also Nowaki and Amuda.

While they thought about what on earth was going to happen, the door opened, and a man who had his mouth concealed appeared.

Chino, who realised he was the Hokage, stared in wonder. Because she would have never imagined that the Hokage in person would come in such place.

"Hello." said Kakashi with a smart expression, and looked at Chino and the others. Chino said "I'm the ringleader."

The higher-up of the village was here. That's why she had to raise the attention here, now.

"I take all the responsibility. That's why I want the other guys to go through with it peaceably."

"Chino, we don't want something like that."

"T-that's right Chino-san, we voluntarily..."

Looking at them, "Calm down now" Kakashi said.

"As a matter of fact, I discussed about you with both Kirigakure and Kumogakure, but...

The Mizukage of Kirigakure said she wanted to take care of you. She said she wanted you to work for Kirigakure."

Chino and the others looked at each other. Especially Nowaki and the others of the Lightning Group were greatly astonished.

"I've heard that now they have no choice but stop this negative chain. Apparently the Mizukage came to this decision after talking about it over and over with the shinobi of the village. Of course, if you say it's fine with you. Also Kumogakure have already agreed. Konoha, too."

At this unexpected turn Chino and the others couldn't hide their confusion. Then Kakashi approached her and the others relaxedly.

"It would take a whole life to atone for the things you did. However, more or less all the shinobi have faults. I have, too. If you would like to fight again, with your own lives."

Kakashi's words soaked into Chino and the others.

Thereupon, the shaved face of a man peeked from Kakashi's back.

"Kakashi-sensei! Let me say few words too 'ttebayo!'

The man had three stripes on each cheek.

"Yeah, yeah, if it can't be helped..." Kakashi said, and left him his place.

"Well"

Before he could say anything, Chino said "Are you Sasuke's friend?"

For some reason she had this feeling.

"Eh, aah... yes! I'm Sasuke's friend, Uzumaki Naruto dattebayo!"

At Chino's words Naruto laughed with a *nishishi*. Then Chino told Naruto "...Your friend rescued me from darkness. Thank you."

Hearing that, Naruto was befuddled for a moment, even forgetting what he wanted to say, but looking somehow embarrassed he laughed saying “Is that so!”
That was the light that shone on the former darkness.

“...so it seems that Chino has returned to the Land of Water with Nowaki and the others~”

There was a visitor at Orochimaru’s hideout. He was Oyashiro En, wearing his eccentric stylish sunglasses.

“At any rate, that’s very bad~, Orochimaru-san. Because despite you knew you were being guarded, you came by the island. Thanks to those people, I’ve almost been arrested. If they tried to arrest everyone, there are people who would answer to as many charges as they like~”

“You weren’t arrested?”

“As you see.”

Orochimaru smiled broadly at Oyashiro, who was talking carelessly.

“As you expected, right?”

“...thanks to you.”

Oyashiro took off his sunglasses and put his hand on his forehead, and without stopping lowered it.

Red eyes, the *Kerryūgan*, appeared.

“In a small community disputes are born easily. Even though we pressed our shoulders against each other and lived like that for many years, trifling quarrels and reciprocal hate accumulated, and in the end we killed each other by chance. When my wife got involved and died, various things became not indifferent to me. Even so my daughter is unexpectedly cute.”

‘I’m a useless parent though’ Oyashiro said.

“What will you do then?”

These words were asked nonchalantly. Oyashiro crossed his arms.

“That’s right~, because weapons aren’t into fashion any more. I guess I’ll build a hot spring resort even in the Valley of Hell.”

Apparently Sakura was right when she thought that it was strange that she was in a good mood.

She were seeing off the Kirigakure and Kumogakure shinobi who were recovering, when Naruto, who had visited Sakura that at last had some free time, told her the words he heard from Chino, looking happy.

Hearing them, Sakura’s chest became hot.

—I’ll also travel to atone my sins.

When he left for his trip, Sasuke had said these words. That time, Sasuke had gone ahead with firm steps.

However, the fact that she wouldn’t have been next to him had been painful for Sakura. Still, she couldn’t wait forever.

In that case, next time. She made the resolve in her heart that if Sasuke went back to Konoha, next time for sure she would follow him, no matter what he’d say.

“In any case, it’s a mysterious feeling dattebayo. Sasuke isn’t in Konoha, but at the same time it’s just like we’re doing missions together.” Naruto said with an excited look.

“So, although he’s not in the village, he’s protecting the village.”

“That’s right. There are many things you can’t do if you’re not an excellent shinobi like Sasuke-kun...”

“Also a guy who does unthinkable things though should have guys who firmly support him, if they can do it properly like this time!”

Hearing Naruto’s words, Sakura exclaimed “Ah”. A certain word came back to Sakura’s mind, who wasn’t inferior to Naruto and Sasuke in terms of study.

It was deeply related to Sasuke.

“What’s the matter, Sakura-chan?”

Sakura smiled at Naruto, who was looking at her oddly.

“Hearing those last words, I remembered something, but have you heard of it?”

“?”

“Well...”

His trip continued. While he looked at the sea that spread in front of him, Sasuke advanced at a quick pace.

The beings that intimidated Kaguya. He thought it would have been better if it had ended up being a needless anxiety, but he couldn’t ignore it anymore.

To look for Kaguya’s traces, Sasuke would collect even more information.

There was a great amount of things he had to do. And only Sasuke, who had the Rinnegan, could do it.

“...hn, Kakashi...?”

A messenger hawk appeared. Sasuke pulled out a letter from the hawk. The report concerning the afterwards of the recent affair was thoroughly written on it.

When Sasuke looked over it, he realised that the letter had another sheet. Sasuke looked at it for no particular reason.

The handwriting was messy.

He recognised it right away. Naruto. The letter came from Naruto.

In it, there were written these things.

—I talked with Sakura-chan. About the current you...

At the following words, Sasuke opened his eyes wide. He wasn’t aware of it. But somehow he knew it inside him.

In the letter there were written down these things.

—You’re just like the military police corps!

The Military Police Corps. The organization that supervised Konoha’s public order, and that made the Uchiha crest its symbol mark.

The Uchiha clan founded it once, and its existence also produced tragedy.

However, it was also true that the Uchiha clan wanted to work for Konoha.

“...military police corps, huh”

Its structure in the world changed, but its purpose was the same. Protecting the world, and protecting Konoha, were tied together.

“...if it’s so, maybe also my older brother was a military police corps too...”

Remembering Itachi, who had worked from outside the village to protect Konoha, Sasuke smiled.

—Even big brother will enter here?

—Well... who knows...

—Do it! Because when I grow up... I'll enter in the Military Police Force too!!
The memories of when he was a child. Sasuke felt a faint pain, but still a smile floated on his mouth.
Sasuke stood still for a moment, looked up at the sky, and changed his direction.
“After so long... are you coming home?”
He wasn't afraid anymore of having to do with it.
He had decided the way he would go ahead of.
Sasuke began walking.
In front of him—there was the Village Hidden in the Leaves.